Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

John A. Parducci

SIX DECADES OF MAKING WINE IN MENDOCINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

With an Introduction by
John J. Golden

Interviews Conducted by
Carole Hicke
in 1990

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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John A. Parducci, circa 1991

Cataloging Information

PARDUCCI, John A. (b. 1918) Winemaker, winery executive

Six Decades of Making Wine in Mendocino County, California, 1992, xiii, 108 pp.

Family of winemakers; winery founded by father and uncle; learning to make wine in the 1930s; assuming responsibilities as winemaker; styles of making wine; emphasizing varietals; expansion of winery; acquiring vineyards; purchase of winery by Teachers Management & Investment Corp.; experimenting with French-American blends; marketing.

Introduction by Judge John J. Golden.

Interviewed in 1990 by Carole Hicke for the Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series, The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed is made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the current chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Ruth Teiser, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years (as yet treated analytically in few writings) will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of in many cases unique materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Winemen
Oral History Series

July 1992
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

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INTRODUCTION--by John J. Golden

John Parducci is known to his closest friends as a man passionately devoted to the outdoors: hunting, fishing, picking abalones, digging clams, shooting birds, and gathering mushrooms.

It isn't surprising that a man with that affection for the product of nature would follow a vocation dedicated to the cultivation and perfection of one of nature's finest products.

In that vocation is seen manifested the same passion which his friends have observed in the pursuit of his avocations.

In winemaking he is an intense perfectionist. His unique palate enables him to judge every characteristic of a wine by taste and, having tasted, he is not reluctant to be judgmental, regardless whether the wine be one of his or someone else's. At the same time, John takes criticism of his own wines in a constructive way, constantly seeking a course towards excellence through experimentation and innovation.

His intense commitment to perfection is accompanied by a good sense of humor, a ready laugh, and a deep concern for those who have shared his life with him.

When consideration was being given to the sale of the Parducci Winery to TMI a couple of decades ago, John's uppermost concern was that provision be made to assure a continued residence for his parents who resided at the winery. When recent developments with TMI suggested the possibility of a sale of the winery by TMI, his uppermost concern was over continued employment for the loyal ranch and winery employees who had been faithful to the Parducci Winery for so long.

Recently, John has acquired a fox terrier, Trixie, who is now his constant companion. She watches TV with him, goes to work at the winery with him every day, rides with him in his Camaro everywhere and waits patiently in the cab for him while he meets or lunches with friends.

John is a perfectionist, whose life is marked with passionate affection and loyalty toward family, friends, his winery, his heritage, and his Trixie.

John L. Golden
Judge of the Superior Court

January 1, 1992
Lakeport, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--John A. Parducci

John A. Parducci, general manager and winemaster of the family-operated Parducci Wine Cellars, was interviewed as part of the Wine Spectator's California Winemen Oral History Series to record the history and development of the oldest operating winery in Mendocino County, California. Parducci's father and uncle established the winery in 1932, and by the end of that decade, John was learning winemaking from his uncle. Assuming full responsibilities for winemaking in the 1940s, then taking over the winery with his brother in the 1960s, he built it into a highly respected business, being one of the first to emphasize the making of varietal wines. Growth and expansion took place in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, and by 1991, five generations of Parduccis had contributed to its operations.

Parducci is a vigorous promoter of wine, and his enthusiasm for the product and the industry comes across clearly in his oral history interviews. These took place on July 30 and 31, 1990, in his office in the winery in Ukiah.

Parducci reviewed his transcript and made some revisions. His assistant, Kathy Pomelia, was helpful in furnishing photographs to illustrate the volume. The Honorable John Golden graciously agreed to write the introduction. Mr. William Heintz, an historian of the wine industry, has studied Mendocino County wineries and furnished some background information for the interviews.

This series is part of the ongoing documenting of California history by the Regional Oral History Office, which is under the direction of Willa Baum, Division Head, and under the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke
Interviewer-Editor

May 1992
Regional Oral History Office
Berkeley, California

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name John Angelo Parducci

Date of birth Jan. 22 - 1918 Birthplace Cloverdale, Calif.

Father's full name Adolph John Parducci

Occupation Vintner - Farmer Birthplace Santa Clara, Calif.

Mother's full name Elsabetta Katherine Lucchetti

Occupation Housewife Birthplace Cloverdale Calif.

Your spouse Margarett louise Romer

Your children Richard John
William Harold

Where did you grow up? Cloverdale & Ukiah Calif.

Present community Ukiah, California

Education Grammar - High School - 2 yrs Jr. College

Occupation(s) Vintner - farmer

Areas of expertise Endogist - carpenter - Electrician - Welder

Other interests or activities Fishing - hunting - wood working
wine experiments

Organizations in which you are active Rotary - Masonry
R.E.A. - Wine Clubs

I BACKGROUND

[Interview 1: July 30, 1990]##[1]

Early Life in Cloverdale

Hicke: I'd like to start by asking you where and when you were born and grew up.

Parducci: January 22, 1918.

Hicke: And where?

Parducci: Cloverdale, in that house right there [points to picture on the wall].

Hicke: Is that house still standing?

Parducci: No. Brown-Forman [Beverage Company] wanted to take pictures of the house and do a little write-up about it.[2] I was absolutely shocked when we went down to Cloverdale to find the house was gone. What happened was that the new freeway had gone through the property. So the house was gone, and no one ever told me. The orange trees are still there, the lemon tree's still there, and a lot of the roses are there.

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[1] This symbol, ##, indicates a tape interruption or the beginning or end of a tape side. For a guide to the tapes, see page 104.

[2] Parducci Wine Cellars and Brown-Forman Beverage Company entered into a joint marketing and national distribution contract in 1986; the agreement was terminated by Parducci in 1990.

Hicke: How did the trees and roses escape?

Parducci: Well, at that time they just removed the house.

Hicke: And they might eventually tear the trees down, too?

Parducci: Yes, it'll all be gone. I would have liked to have the pictures of the house. My cousins lived in it after my family left Cloverdale. This is the mountain [points to picture] that's been causing some controversy now. Some city people have come to Cloverdale and decided to put a subdivision alongside that mountain, and they've taken down all the oak trees. There's a big controversial battle going on in Cloverdale right now, objecting to the removal of more trees. And that's the old Preston estate, which was a commune when I was a boy. You've seen the big clock on the tower?

Hicke: Oh, yes.

Parducci: They had their own church and their own little winery, and a beautiful home which burned down two or three years ago. I used to spend half of my childhood there.

Hicke: What were you doing?

Parducci: The grammar school I went to was--you could throw a rock across the river to it. As kids we used to do a lot of hiking. It was very close, not even four hundred yards away from the school. As a matter of fact, after Dr. Lee bought the estate, I took some of the barrels from their little winery. They had about seventy puncheons that were still filled full of wine.

Hicke: From their little winery?

Parducci: Yes. But it was flavored wine. What they did, they had purchased sweet wine and added seaweed cut like salami in it, and big, long cinnamon bark, and pomegranates. They had dozens of large bottles labeled "extractum" that was produced in New York. Some of the extractum was also added to the barrels. I have one of the bottles in my cellar at the present time.

Hicke: What's extractum?

Parducci: It looks like Geritol, dark and syrupy. It made the wine taste medicinal. [laughter] I suppose it's a concoction of some herbs.

Hicke: Is extractum alcohol?

Parducci: No, it was a flavored root of some kind. It was very dark and licorice-like. They dumped that into the wine and made something like Geritol, or whatever it was that they believed in. It was very interesting.

Hicke: What happened to the wine that you found there?

Parducci: We dumped it. It wasn't wine anymore. I was hoping it would have been port and sherries and muscatels in their original state, you know. It would have been nearly a hundred years old, and it would have been fun to taste. But it had all been flavored with some other things, so we dumped it out here. You could smell it all over the country. It had a beautiful smell; it smelled like Vermouth almost. The sheepherders were drinking it, but I wouldn't drink it.

Hicke: It didn't taste as good as it smelled?

Parducci: Oh, it tasted pretty good. But what were you going to do with that much of it, not knowing what was in it? I didn't want them to fool with it.

Adolph Parducci

Hicke: Let's go back a little bit and get the story of your father starting the winery. I know that he lived in San Jose very early.

Parducci: My father was born in Santa Clara [1896].

Hicke: This is Adolph we're talking about?

Parducci: Yes. When he was six years old, the family went back to Italy [1902]. I know why they went back to Italy; it was because the Santa Clara Valley was all truck gardens, and there were no mountains. They were used to the mountains.

Hicke: How did they get to Santa Clara?

Parducci: That I've never been able to find out. I imagine they had to arrive in San Francisco by boat and then went to Santa Clara by rail or wagon.

Hicke: But were they winegrowers?

Parducci: Yes, they grew grapes. Because the ranch we have in Italy--

Hicke: Did they grow grapes in Santa Clara?

Parducci: No. I don't know what they did in Santa Clara. I've never been able to find that out.

Hicke: I've interrupted you in your story. They went back to Italy--

Parducci: I don't know what my grandparents did in Santa Clara. My mother might know, but I doubt it. Anyway, from Santa Clara to Ukiah or Cloverdale was a long way away in those days. I guess they didn't realize there were any mountains in California or any properties around that reminded them of their homeland, so they went back. When my father was sixteen, ten years later, he stowed away on a boat with his two brothers and a sister and landed in San Francisco again [1912].

Hicke: When they were back in Italy they worked in vineyards, right?

Parducci: Dad worked in the vineyards.

Hicke: And your grandfather?

Parducci: As a matter of fact, he was killed by lightning working the vineyards with a team of horses. I never knew him or met him. Then my grandmother died. Let's see, I don't remember when Dad went back, but all there was left was his sister. I don't know when Grandma died; she died a long time ago.

Hicke: What part of Italy did they go back to?

Parducci: Near Lucca--Tuscany. My father was Toscano.

Wine Descriptions

Parducci

1988 Gamay Beaujolais: Light ruby red and brilliantly clear. Fresh, fruity with an appealing berry character.

1988 Pinot Noir: Brilliant garnet colored wine with a delicate fragrance. Serve as an accompaniment to beef, lamb or veal.

1987 Zinfandel: Deep ruby color, fresh and fruity to both nose and palate. Typical berry-like flavor.

1988 Vintage Red: Fresh, simple and likeable, with a light berry aroma.

1987 Cabernet Sauvignon: Ruby rich in color, delightful Cabernet character. An intense wine with lots of fruit & tremendous balance.

1980 Charbono: Very Complex. Very enjoyable now or cellar another 5 years.

1986 Petite Sirah: Intense spicy aromas. Youthful berry flavors. Very good structure, long, rich finish.

1980 Cellarmaster Petite Sirah: Deep ruby red, robust aromas, drink now or cellar for up to 10 years.

1988 Chardonnay: A full bodied wine with an abundance of fruit and varietal character. The first 400 cases is 1987 oak-aged Chardonnay just released from John Parducci's library.

1988 French Colombard: Good, clean crisp food wine. The tartness makes it an ideal aperitif and seafood complement.

1988 Sauvignon Blanc: Off-dry, rich varietal character, blended with Semillion grapes for added complexity.

1988 Vintage White: Superb quality, distinctive off-dry style.

1988 Chenin Blanc: Well balanced, soft and silky with a hint of honeydew.

1989 Mendocino Riesling: Lively tartness, medium sweetness.

1989 White Zinfandel: A fruity, lightly blushed wine with a berry-like aroma. A great beverage wine, easy to drink.

1988 Gewurztraminer: An off-dry, very spicy, fragrant fresh wine. "A sweeter wine with charm ..." Dan Berger, L.A. Times.

1989 Muscat Canelli: Rich, sweet, flavorful dessert wine specially made from North Coast grapes.

1984 Late Harvest Zinfandel: Excellent dessert wine, similar in style to a port.

Marion Brut Champagne: A one-time-only bottle-fermented sparkling white wine served at John's 70th Birthday Party and Golden Wedding Anniversary.

Konocti

1988 Alegre-Red: Festive off-dry red made from Gamay and Zinfandel; refreshing ripe-grape flavors.

1986 Cabernet Sauvignon: Bordeaux-style dry red with mellow briary-berry and toasty-vanilla flavors.

1986 Merlot: Full-bodied dry red with rich cherry and black-currant aromas and flavors.

1987 Chardonnay: Rich dry white with crisp lemon, tropical fruit and oaky-vanilla flavors.

1988 Fumé Blanc: Our most famous wine; Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon yield herbal citrus and melon flavors.

1989 Alegre - White: Zesty off-dry white made from Chenin Blanc; crisp apple and melon flavors.

1989 Alegre - Blush: Fresh new blush made from Gamay; delightful strawberry fruit flavors.

1988 White Riesling: Off-dry white with fine flowery aromas and brisk apricot and apple flavors.

Late Harvest White Riesling: Very rare dessert wine; luscious flavors of dried apricots, honey and cream.

Hicke: That's a beautiful little town.

Parducci: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I have a picture of it in my office that somebody who's from there just mailed me. It's a walled-in city. They lived in a little town called Guamo, I think it was. We still own the property there. When Dad left, he willed the property over to his sister, and then her children inherited it, which would be my cousins.

Hicke: And they're still there?

Parducci: Yes. Angelo died two years ago, but Maria still lives there. She lives in Montecatini, just a little way west of Florence.

Hicke: Aren't there some famous baths there?

Parducci: Yes. It's kind of a retirement city. It's a beautiful city. I was there about five years ago.

Hicke: So you get to go back there occasionally and find your roots?

Parducci: I've only been back there one time; I went back there for business reasons, to have some bottling equipment designed for me, and met my cousins for the first time--very, very charming people and well to do. I understand that the freeway is going through our property now, which is up in the mountains, you know.

Hicke: The same story over again.

Parducci: Yes. Well, it's that way everywhere in the world.

Hicke: We left your father stowed away on a ship.

Parducci: They landed in San Francisco, very ill. As a matter of fact, my father almost died. He attributes his recovery to eating hot peppers. I can remember him always telling me that. Then, inasmuch as he worked in the fields, the thing he knew the best was grapes. He was looking for grapes for the home winemakers, and on his journeys to Northern California looking for grapes he met my [maternal] grandfather, who was a truck gardener, and my mom. He married Mom and had the first winery there after they were married.

Hicke: She was from Cloverdale?

Parducci: Yes. We were both born in that house!

Adolph Begins Making Wine, 1918

Hicke: So your father moved in with your mother's family?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: And began doing what?

Parducci: He started making wine, which was during Prohibition. They made altar wines and they bootlegged, like everybody in the world did. The vineyard that they had in Cloverdale was really small, and Dad was looking for a larger vineyard. So he came north to Ukiah and found that it reminded him of Italy. He found this ranch, and the person who owned it had put it up for sale and had gone to Italy. Dad put a $5,000 deposit on it. When the man came back, he changed his mind and didn't want to sell it. But he had taken the deposit, so my father wound up buying the ranch.

Hicke: Did the ranch or the land have a name?

Parducci: I don't remember the name of the ranch, but I imagine we could find that out if we went back into the deeds and all that. But I am told it was one of the first vineyards in Mendocino County.

Hicke: And it was here when your father bought it?

Parducci: Yes, there was about forty acres here in vineyards.

Hicke: Planted in what?

Parducci: Oh, they were old; they were probably planted in the late 1800s. I remember the varieties were Alicantes, Burgers, Béclan, Colombard, and there was some Sauvignon blanc here. That's about all the varieties I can remember; oh, and there was some Charbono. Those are the varieties that were planted. I can remember the University [of California,

Davis] used to come up here and pick some of these grapes for experimental purposes.

Hicke: When was this?

Parducci: This was in the early or late thirties.

Hicke: Who came up from the university?

Parducci: Dr. [Albert J.] Winkler, and I don't know who else. But I would suppose they'd have records of that. They used to come up here and pick these grapes just for experimental purposes, to make wine out of them.

Hicke: How did they know about these grapes?

Parducci: I guess they had records of all the varieties that were planted in each county. They still keep records of the acreages and the tonnages of every county.

Hicke: I read about a winery of your father's that burned down.

Parducci: That one right there.

Hicke: That was the one in Cloverdale?

Parducci: Yes. Wineries in those days were very small; they were mostly barns with a press and a couple of tanks and a couple of jack pumps, and that was the winery. There were no big, elaborate wineries, except for Italian Swiss [Colony] in Sonoma County. That's the only one that comes to mind that was huge. Also our own Garrett Winery in Mendocino County, capacity about two million gallons.

Hicke: You said your father made altar wine?

Parducci: Yes, he made sweet wines--dessert wines.

Hicke: Do you remember where he sold any of this wine?

Parducci: No. I would think that most of it was bootlegged locally and within the range of San Francisco and Eureka.

Hicke: Grape juice for home consumption?

Parducci: Everybody was allowed to make wine for home consumption. This was one reason he started buying grapes. That's why

he sent me to New York; I was selling grapes on Hoboken markets for the home winemakers.

Hicke: I want to get that story, but let's go back first and get the story of establishing this winery. Your father came up here and started buying property--

Establishing the Vineyard in Mendocino County, 1928

Parducci: He came up here and bought this ranch in 1921. We moved up here in 1927 or '28--the family did. Prior to that we were commuting every weekend, because Dad was running the ranch and had people working here. We commuted for six or seven years and finally moved the full family up here to the old farmhouse on the ranch.

Hicke: How did you commute? By horses?

Parducci: No, we had a car! My dad had the first Cadillac ever in Mendocino County. Then we had a Chevrolet touring car. I can remember both of these. I'll never forget the commute, because I used to get ill every time we came up the highway. The old Hopland Grade was just nothing but turns. All four boys were just erping their hearts out every weekend. We just hated coming up to Ukiah--hated it. Finally we moved up here permanently.

Hicke: Was that in '28?

Parducci: About then.

Hicke: Did he build a house?

Parducci: No, there was a house here, and we lived in it for a long time, and then he remodeled it.

Hicke: That's the one that's right across the way here?

Parducci: That one right there. Then we remodeled it again after I moved into it. So it's been remodeled two or three times. In 1933 that picture [of four boys] was taken because my father brought me to San Francisco and had this suit made for me--a blue serge suit--which my oldest boy used on his wedding day. It was a nice suit, all virgin wool. My

father had a camel-hair overcoat with a silk lining that he had refitted for me. That picture was taken with the suit; all four boys' picture was taken. I had graduated from grammar school, and Dad had enrolled me in high school in a college preparatory course. I took all my books with me for my freshman year.

John Goes to New Jersey in 1934 to Sell Grapes

Hicke: Where did you go?

Parducci: Union City, New Jersey. I arrived at Grand Central Station, and from there I commuted over to Union City, New Jersey, and lived with this family that were complete strangers to all of us, except the lady who ran the home was the sister of one of my father's and my aunt's close friends who ran the Alder Glen Springs in Cloverdale, very famous springs and resort. My aunt was a waitress there, and she had worked there for many, many years. Her boss's sister was the one that I stayed with. It was a family of two girls and a boy. One of the girls was the same age as I was, and one of them was a legal secretary. The boy worked in a delicatessen. The girl who was my age went to school, and the others all went to work, and the mother was a homemaker. The father worked in the mines.

Hicke: Did your father send you to school there?

Parducci: No, I did my own studying.

Hicke: How did you happen to go to the East Coast?

Parducci: Well, because my father was building the winery here. We all knew that Prohibition was going to be repealed, so he started building the winery one year before it actually happened. So we had our grapes that we had to sell. Prior to that time, he was always having a broker here ship them to the East Coast, and most of the time we lost money. In order to ship grapes back East, you had to ship them to a consignee, and that cost fifty dollars a car. So he decided, "Why don't I send John over there, and he can meet potential customers and get an education along with it?"

Hicke: This explains why you were so young when you went East to sell grapes; you were also going to school at the same time.

Parducci: I was just as big as I am now, more or less a grownup.

Hicke: You must have been about sixteen?

Parducci: In 1933 I was fourteen, just going on fifteen. I commuted from Union City, New Jersey, to Hoboken every day, and opened up the car--or cars; whatever there were there--and then went to the auction market and either sold it or kept it. I used to call my father up every evening and tell him what we were offered for the car. If we didn't get $2.25 a box, I would hold it for another day, and maybe I'd hold it for two days, and then on the third day I'd sell it, regardless of price. Grapes deteriorated very fast after the long trip, and we did not dare keep them too long.

Hicke: No refrigeration.

Parducci: No, only while in transit, cooled with blocks of ice .

Hicke: That was a lot of responsibility for a fourteen-year old.

Parducci: Yes, but it didn't bother me any, because I didn't know any better. I was around grownups all my life, so I was more mature than my brothers. I will always remember a lot of things: thousands of redcaps, and in those days you tipped them a nickel for packing your suitcases. I would never let them pack my suitcases, because I was stronger than they were. So I'd always have to be wrestling my suitcase with the redcaps. When I arrived in Grand Central Station, it was just like going into another world. I'd never seen anything like it in my life, and I never saw so many people in my life. I was lost for an hour or two because they couldn't find me. They finally found me, and then we went to their home.

A lot of impressions I had really stayed with me to this very day. When I first met the family, I said to myself, "I'm with a bunch of gangsters!" You know, the Mafia and all that, because they would say, "What kind of 'woik' do you do?" "You got 'boids' in California?" Eastern dialect unknown to me . I said, "I've got to be with a bunch of gangsters!" Then when I walked into the house I smelled this real foul odor, and I said, "Boy,

these people are really terrible housekeepers. This house smells terrible." Well, I found out that the homes were heated with coal, and if you never smelled coal in a house before, it smells awful. I wound up helping them stoke. It was a two-story house, and they had a trap door on the lower floor or cellar which the coal was thrown into. We had to stoke the furnace frequently each day.

Anyway, I had a very nice experience with them. I found that they were very, very nice people. They loved the opera; I learned to enjoy going to the opera with them. I went to a Snelling-Carnero fight with them. I think that's who it was; I know it was Primo Carnero, because he knocked this fighter clean out of the ring.

Then I learned how to ice skate and how to toboggan and all kinds of things. Union City, New Jersey, where I stayed, was just one block off of Burgerline Avenue, and Burgerline Avenue was the longest avenue in the world (San Pablo is the second longest). It had a kind of a slope to it, and of course in the wintertime all the kids would do was toboggan and go to people's houses and have hot chocolate, refreshments, and all kinds of things.

On the East Coast, ball diamonds have a curb around them, and in the wintertime they are filled with water, which freezes, and that's where everybody ice skates. So I had an interesting and enjoyable experience while I was in New Jersey.

Hicke: Were you going to school, too?

Parducci: No. I just studied on my own with the books that were given to me, and then when I got back I just turned all my work in and went on as a sophomore.

Hicke: My word! So you were out there a year?

Parducci: No, I left here in July and came back here I think on the 28th day of February, something like that. So I was there four or five months.

Hicke: By February the grape shipments had ceased?

Parducci: Oh, yes, by October, and then I stayed there a little longer. After the grapes were sold each day, I would go and spend the rest of the day in the Bronx Zoo. It was the

largest zoo in the world, and I never did get to see all of it. All of my free time I would spend there.

Hicke: What did you feel like when you saw all that snow?

Parducci: Oh, I'd seen snow around here lots of times; we have snow occasionally. I can remember while on a train, at the one-mile [elevation] marker in Denver, we started getting snow. And then, of course, it was snow all the way into New York--solid snow. I'll never forget that ride. It took us four days and five nights to get there. Then for weeks and weeks at a time I'd go to bed and I'd hear "clickety-clop, clickety-clop," the sound of the train on the tracks. Also, we slept on chairs that reclined back. Heat would come on one side of the train during half of the night, and the rest of the night the heat would come on the other side. You'd have to get up and move over to where the heat was so you could stay warm. It was a very interesting experience.

There was no train that went through Chicago, so you had to take a taxi to get from one side of Chicago to the other side to get on the train again. We went through the dirtiest part of Chicago; I'll never forget the papers and the filth that were knee-deep all along. I guess we went through the commercial part of Chicago.

Hicke: Were you doing this by yourself?

Parducci: Yes.

Family Traditions

Hicke: Tell me a little bit about some of the things you learned from your father.

Parducci: Well, as far as the wine business is concerned, technically very little. I learned from my father to be a very meticulous person; he and my mother both were very meticulous. I learned to be a good housekeeper. I learned to be honest. One thing he never would stand for was to lie to him or to lie to anybody else. His handshake was his bond, and he never, never went back on his word. I learned that. And I learned to love my family. I didn't

learn a lot from him as far as winemaking is concerned, because they made wine haphazardly, and the way it came was the way it came out. But he did teach me one thing: you can't make good wine without good grapes.

I think one reason that I'm more or less successful is that I had a good teacher in being a man, and whatever I did I had to do near perfect or perfect. He wouldn't compromise; if you were going to do something, you did it right. So that's the way I've always been. I'm a very meticulous person. As a matter of fact, I think you can ask anybody in this office or out in the field, or even the growers--I try to make good wine. I try to keep our gardens and our facility immaculate and a joy to see. I've never compromised. I've found that by compromising there's no end to compromising. However, all my people have worked for me for many years--many years--and they all understand that that's the way we want it, and that's the way it is. That's what I learned from my father.

You see, there were four boys in our family. We went to work before school, we went to work after school, and it was the Depression. But my father always had ample food for us to eat; and four boys can eat you out of house and home, as you know. We used to take French bread like this [demonstrates one foot long]--one loaf apiece, slice it down the middle, put salami and cheese on it, and go out in the fields and work. We came home and we helped Mom do the dishes, and we kept our rooms. We didn't just throw our clothes here and there; we were taught to put our shoes in order, our clothes in order, and we were taught to take care of everything.

Hicke: I was just going to ask you about the influence of your mother; perhaps that's one of the things--

Parducci: Well, my mother is still alive and well. She has to use a walker now, but she still wants and keeps a nice home. She is very meticulous and taught us well.

Hicke: Your three brothers are the same way? [George, Vernon, Adolph Jr.]

Parducci: Well, I've lost one of my brothers; he had a heart attack. But my other two brothers are well and both very successful. We were born and raised on ranches, so we know how to do most everything. We try to keep our facility

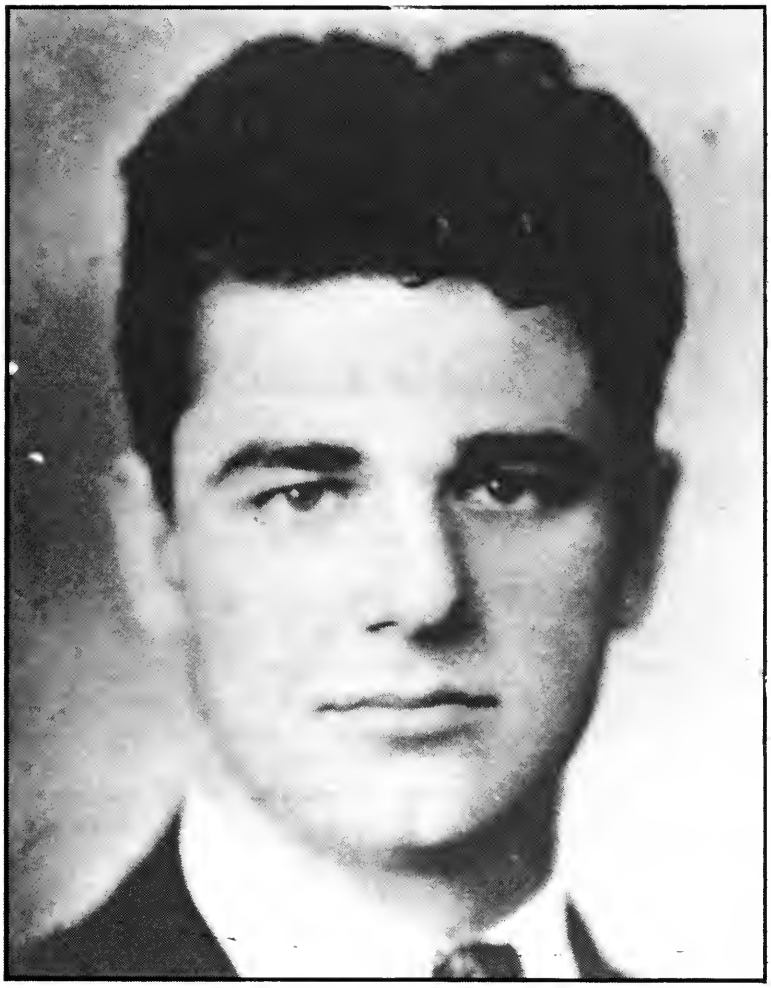
immaculate. I try to teach my employees to be proud of the place they work. They know if there is something I don't like, I'm going to raise the devil. They appreciate that. I try not to be unreasonable about it; they just have to understand that's the way it I want it. I don't think you can be sloppy at work in a sloppy environment and make good wine.

Hicke: I was just going to say that that's how you produce a good wine.

Parducci: We'll probably receive 120 or 130 awards again this year. Mother Nature hasn't been very good to us the last three years, either, but we just do the best we can. My employees in the lab are meticulous and hardworking. They take great pride in what they do. To take pride and to do the best you can I learned from my father and my mother. I didn't learn too much as far as winemaking is today. Technology has changed so fast that even I'm not with it every day. However, I guess that's progress, and we are all making better wines.

Hicke: But your parents gave you the tools to handle that?

Parducci: They gave me my health, they gave me my brains to use. My father left the winery in 1948 because he felt he wasn't qualified to cope with the modern and changing technology that was taking place in our wine industry.



John Parducci as a young man.

II MAKING WINE IN THE 1930S

The Wine Industry After Prohibition

Hicke: Let's go back to 1934, when you came back from New Jersey. Did your father see the end of Prohibition coming all along? Was he pretty determined?

Parducci: I could not answer that. I would think so, inasmuch as he was involved in the industry very deeply--because he knew everybody in California, and they all believed that it was definitely going to be repealed in '33. I don't know prior to that time if they had any inkling of it or not.

Hicke: It seems as if he was a determined man all through the twenties--

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Parducci: I think if you look at most of the people in this book [looking through Wine Pioneers], every one of them was very determined [laughs], and in a lot bigger way than my father. [Horace O.] Lanza--I knew him real well. I didn't know Louis Martini very well. But all of these people here were pretty determined. Antonio [Perelli-Minetti] had the largest winery in Mendocino County. They were all very determined. They had their lives in it.

Hicke: Did your father communicate with these other people?

Parducci: Oh, my father knew lots of these people.

Hicke: Even during the twenties?

Parducci: I'm not sure about the twenties; I was too young then to remember. We knew Perelli-Minetti and Lanza because they were in Mendocino County.

Hicke: He probably knew everybody in this county.

Parducci: Yes, he knew everybody up here in this county. I don't know when he met Leon [D. Adams], but we knew Leon when he started Wine Institute. I couldn't really go back that far and be very accurate; I was two years old in the twenties.

Parducci Winery In the Thirties

Hicke: In 1932, say, did he plant a crop with the realization that--

Parducci: We had vineyards before 1932, as I stated before.

Hicke: I mean, did he try to increase the production?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: What steps did he take to approach the end of Prohibition?

Parducci: Lots of our home ranch had forest, and that was all cleared off and vineyards were planted. He was increasing his acreage considerably with the funds he had. Don't forget, that was the Depression, so it was all done with blood and guts and no money. Like this winery was all built by--

Hicke: I'd like to hear about the building of the winery.

Parducci: The winery was built by a father and four sons. There wasn't even any electricity; everything was done by hand. Concrete was poured by hand. As a matter of fact, you can take a look at one of those walls, and you can see where we stopped pouring every day. The building was all done by hand, by a father and four sons. The land was all cleared by us; all these rock walls were built by us. We used to hire all Indians, because that's all the labor there was--the Pomo Indians.

Hicke: You hired the Pomo Indians?

Parducci: Yes. Mostly all the grape pickers we had were Indians. The Indians used to be around here to pick all the hops, too, and the pears and the prunes. There were no Mexicans, just white people and Indians.

Hicke: Where did they all live?

Parducci: On the reservation, and then a lot of them lived off the reservation. They had families; I went to school with a lot of the Indians.

Hicke: What did they do the rest of the year, when they weren't picking?

Parducci: I don't know what they did. Some were basket weavers. I guess a lot of them lived on the reservation and they didn't have to do anything; they were supported by the government. A lot of those Indians were my friends. Our grammar school baseball team used to play against the Indian team.

Hicke: Baseball?

Parducci: Yes, baseball. As a matter of fact, in my home I have Indian paintings that were painted by a distant relative of my wife's family, a very famous Indian artist. Some of her paintings are now worth $150,000 to $200,000, and the subjects are all people I went to school with.

Hicke: What was her name?

Parducci: Grace Hudson.

Hicke: Oh, she's the one whose work is in the museum in Ukiah. She's your wife's relative?

Parducci: Margarett would know her family connection. She died the year we were married. We have five of her paintings. They're very beautiful.

Hicke: Do you know when the winery was bonded? Was it 1932 or '33?

Parducci: We have just confirmed the date. Mr. [William F.] Heinz has researched all of the history, and he found the date in the records.

Hicke: I'll get the date [August 1, 1933]. There probably weren't a lot of people applying for--

Parducci: There were only 70 wineries left in California out of the 370 or 350. He tried to find our original bonded winery number in Cloverdale, and I think he found it. I'd never been able to find it. He went to Sacramento and researched the records there. I always wanted to know what the license number was in Cloverdale. I think it's all in that transcript that Mr. Heinz has.

More About Selling Grapes in New Jersey

Hicke: Let me ask you a little more about your work on the East Coast. Who was buying the grapes?

Parducci: This is very interesting. I got a big kick out of this. Every city block had a buyer.

Hicke: Every block? The homeowners?

Parducci: Just about every city block. That's the way it appeared to me, anyway. They would go to the auction market and buy a car of grapes. They would take it back to their little community, whether it was one block or two blocks or whatever, and they would sell five boxes or ten boxes or whatever to the home winemaker. The interesting part about it was that every one of these brokers--which is what you might call them--would have a gimmick. For instance, "If you buy the grapes from me, I'll take them and deliver them to your house, and I'll crush them for you." Then another person down the block would say, "If you buy them from me, I'll crush them and I'll press them for you." They all had gimmicks that would make people buy their grapes. As a young boy, it was very interesting to me that they all had a sales pitch.

They made their own wine, and of course they drank a lot of it. Those were first generation Europeans, and they drank something like forty gallons per capita. That was a lot of wine. They used it as a food; at every meal they drank wine. So there were lots and lots of grapes sold in New York and in New Jersey. I mean thousands of cars. A

car held about 1,250 boxes, which is the equivalent of about 25 tons of grapes. A carload of grapes sounds like a lot, but actually it wasn't very much. Twenty-five tons of grapes equated to about four hundred gallons, or wine for twenty families.

We'd open the cars up, and people walked down this ramp, which was about a quarter of a mile long with cars on both sides. They would look at these grapes and take down the number of the car and go to the auction market, and when the car came up they would bid on it. If it brought a profit to us, we sold it; if it didn't bring a profit, we'd hold it over for a day or two.

Hicke: What kind of grapes were they?

Parducci: All Zinfandels. Everything that came off this ranch was Zinfandel. However, there were a lot of other varieties. There were Muscatels, Alicantes, and all kinds of other varieties, but from our ranch it was all Zinfandels.

Hicke: Did your father have any trouble getting railroad car space?

Parducci: No. That's the only way grapes were shipped in those days. Cars were a dime a dozen. And they were all iced. They had different stops; there were bunkers in each end, and they would stop maybe every 500 miles and a lot of ice would be dumped into the bunkers. That's how they kept them cool.

Hicke: You said sometimes they would even last two or three days after they got there.

Parducci: I think it took two weeks for them to get there. The Zinfandels shipped well, because they were very ripe, you know, and that's why the winemakers liked them. The winemakers also liked them because they had a lot of sugar. The family winemakers wanted good, ripe grapes, and those are the ones they bid the most on in the market. Then some of them would buy a carload of Muscats. As you know, Europeans like a little bit of white grapes in with their red grapes. So they would buy Muscats or some other varieties that they would mix.

Hicke: How did your father get the grapes to the railroad?

Parducci: They were picked in the field, and we just hauled them by truck and stacked them in the cars. We had a Chevrolet truck and a Reo truck. You don't see the Reos anymore, but you do see the Chevys.

Hicke: Is there anything more about that period that we should cover?

Parducci: Yes. On that trip some other things impressed me. I said it was during the Depression, and on the way to Hoboken from Union City, New Jersey, we had to go through Fifth Avenue or Grand Avenue (I can't remember which), and I'll never forget the bread lines. The bread lines were as far as you could see, and they'd have a little hut where they were giving a cup of coffee and a sandwich to all the poor people in line. That was also the year that some balloon got away from some child or grownup, and it went up to the top of the Empire State Building and got hung up on the top of the building.

I used to have my suit cleaned and pressed every day for nineteen cents. I wore it every day to the yards, so I had it cleaned every day!

Hicke: This is the same suit that your son got married in?

Parducci: Yes. Oh, it was a nice suit. It wasn't worn much after I came home. When I got back home there weren't many occasions to wear a suit. We were farmers, you know. I wore it when we went to church on Sundays, but it never did get a lot of wear.

Hicke: Anything else about New Jersey?

Parducci: No, I think I've covered New Jersey pretty well. I told you I learned to ice skate there, and toboggan, and met a lot of nice people.

School and Work in the Winery: 1930s

Hicke: When you came back, what did you start in on?

Parducci: When I came back I turned all my work in to the high school and went on as a sophomore and worked in the fields and winery before and after school.

Hicke: We're looking at a picture of you in the lab, and you're studying something through a microscope.

Parducci: Yes, I'm looking at yeast cells under a microscope.

Hicke: Did you work in the lab? Or did you do everything?

Parducci: When I came home I was fifteen and a sophomore. This photograph was taken a lot later than that, I think; yes, because that microscope is what I had in 1948. I don't know how old I was there; it looks like I was about nineteen or twenty. I know that bottling machine is a '48 vintage.

Hicke: We're still in the 1930s. What kind of technology did you have in the vineyard?

Parducci: We learned how to plant grapes, raise grapes--everything there was to do with a vineyard.

Hicke: Everything was done by hand?

Parducci: Yes. Dusting by hand, picking by hand, pruning--everything was done by hand.

Hicke: Weeding?

Parducci: All done by hand. As a matter of fact, in the thirties we were still doing some of our work with horses. Like this hill here was all worked with horses--this hill that you see over here with the sign on it. It had grapes on it. When we moved from Cloverdale up here, we brought our horses with us. That's when the old Fordson tractor came into being--you know, with the big spikes in the wheels? My dad had two of those wheel tractors.

Hicke: What were they used for?

Parducci: Plowing and disking and cultivating. In those days they were awkward, and I can remember spending half of our time getting them unstuck, because they were underpowered. They were just the first tractors ever made.

Hicke: They were primarily for clearing the land and starting the vineyard?

Parducci: No, they were for cultivating the soil; they didn't have enough power for clearing. They were mainly for working the ground.

Hicke: Would your dad plant some new vines every year? Or how often did he expand?

Parducci: Well, not every year, because when this ranch was all planted he didn't plant any more. I can't remember how many years it took us to plant this ranch--probably three or four years.

Hicke: How many acres is this ranch?

Parducci: This was 120 acres. This is the original property; this is what we call the home ranch.

Hicke: Then did you work in the lab or with any of the chemistry of it?

Parducci: Yes, I started making wine in 1933 with my father. I did all the lab work, because he didn't know anything about chemistry; he didn't even know a yeast cell from a jack rabbit. He didn't know anything about the chemistry of it at all. So I started doing this--making the yeast cultures and making wine more scientifically than in the past. Then we started making wine for Petri [Wine Company].

Hicke: You sold it to them in bulk?

Parducci: Yes. Then from Petri we went to--we made wine for Christian Brothers for many years, and then we made wine for other wineries. We sold wine to Roma. Everything was bulk wine in those days; very little was bottled here--just some for our tasting room. We started bottling more probably in the early forties. It was for our tasting room, for people who dropped in here, and some sold in northern California. The rest of it was all gone out in bulk. This is one reason why he sent me to New York--to make customers. It so happened that some of the people I met there became our customers in later years, because we sold a lot of wine in barrels and in gallons to the East Coast after Prohibition. Also, people like Bartholomeo Pio came out here to Southern California and purchased a

winery. I think they still own that winery. That's one of the people I met. I met four different families that became customers of ours.

Hicke: You graduated from high school?

Parducci: Yes, and I met my wife in my last year of high school. She was one year ahead of me, born and raised here.

Hicke: Her name is--

Parducci: Margarett Romer--English, German, and French. We went to Santa Rosa J.C. [Junior College], and I majored in languages and in chemistry.

Working With Dr. Edmond H. Twight

Parducci: I might add that during the late thirties or forties--I think it was in the thirties--a man named Harold Bolla, who lived in Geyserville and was a promoter, decided to form a group of small wineries to promote their wines under one identity. They hired Dr. [Edmond H.] Twight, a professor of enology from the university, to be the head enologist.[1] For about five years I accompanied Dr. Twight and got a lot of my training from him.

Hicke: You accompanied him where?

Parducci: Well, we were going from winery to winery, and we were making wine at all these different wineries; he was the head enologist and I the helper.

Hicke: How did you happen to become acquainted with him?

Parducci: I think this Mr. Bolla was acquainted with him.

Hicke: And your winery was one of the ones?

Parducci: Yes.

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[1] See Maynard A. Amerine, "Edmund Henry Twight, 1874-1957," Wines & Vines 38 (5):29-30.

Hicke: So you just started going around with him?

Parducci: Yes. I got a lot of my training from him. Later on [Louis] Petri hired him, and he was the head enologist over at Escalon for Petri. I used to go over every summer and work with him in the lab because we were making wine for Petri. His oldest son was the head winemaker for Spice Islands, or the Muscat Cooperative. His name was Walter Twight.

His youngest son, Benny Twight, was the man who was my age. The university wanted to send him to France to wine enology school and to later on come back and take his father's place. My father was going to send me with Benny; that's why I majored in French. Then the war broke out, and my three brothers went into the service. I was the oldest son, so they didn't take me. I was 4-F anyway. Benny became a ranger in the Packwood Forest in the state of Washington, and that's where he retired from. So I didn't get to go to France, and Benny didn't get to go to France either.

Hicke: What kinds of things do you recall about Dr. Twight? What were you learning from him?

Parducci: Very meticulous winemaker. A very small man. A very likeable person. I enjoyed Dr. Twight very much, and I learned a lot from him.

Hicke: Do you think he was more interested in theory and didn't quite understand or care about the practical aspects of winemaking?

Parducci: Well, I don't know if he was ever in charge of winemaking on a huge scale at all, even when he was over at Petri. He was in complete control of the lab. I don't know if he was actually the winemaker. Nevertheless, I learned a lot from him.

Hicke: About the chemistry?

Parducci: About the chemistry of the wine, yes. I learned how to do my lab work really well, which later became obsolete anyway, you know. We were doing it the old-fashioned way, making our own solutions and everything. Nowadays you don't do anything like that; most everything is done with scientific apparatus. Reagents and all your chemicals in

ampules are prepared for you and are more accurate. Lab work has changed dramatically for the better, and I guess we will see many more changes.

Winemaking Then and Now

Hicke: Is it a lot less fun this way?

Parducci: Well, it was much more fun the old way. Wines were simple, production methods were simple; we had fewer varieties to think about. Consumers drank more and were less critical of what they drank. I don't know if I like the world of computers. In the old days we did everything hands on. We improvised and worked with what we had. Most of us on farms learned to do everything. We learned the hard way. I learned to be a carpenter, an electrician, and a welder. That's what I did during the war in my hometown, along with working in the winery.

Hicke: Where did you do all this?

Parducci: We helped build my dad's house, I built two-thirds of my house and a couple of apartments in town. I've done a lot of carpenter work.

Hicke: How did you learn to do it?

Parducci: I worked as an apprentice for a while and then as a journeyman. All of us boys have talent when it comes to doing things around the house or farm. Lamps around here, this big chandelier you see here--that's one of my hobbies. But it's just fun for me. I've done a lot of the rock walls also that you see around the winery.

More on the 1930s

Hicke: Let's go back to the thirties. In 1938 was the great prorate. Did you have anything to do with that?

Parducci: No, I didn't have anything to do with it, but almost every winery was involved in that.

Hicke: I think it was optional for the North Coast wine grapes.

Parducci: That was one of the things that was very serious for us in the wine industry in those days, I remember, but I didn't get involved in it at all. My father was involved in it. My father was very much involved in it, going to many meetings. It was a hot issue.

Hicke: I also wanted to ask if you know anything about what the other wineries in the area were doing. Your father knew all of them, but I don't know if you know much about it.

Parducci: There was only one winery here that amounted to anything in size, and that was California Grape Products, which later became Garrett & Co., the Virginia Dare people.

Hicke: Who were the other seven wineries that you said your father was involved in with Dr. Twight? They weren't necessarily in this county?

Parducci: No. I think there were a few from this county. I can't remember who they were. I can name the seven wineries that were here in Mendocino County at that time. I know Pacific Vineyards, Geyserville, was one of the members, and it's no longer there; its winery is gone. There were others, but I'd have a hard time telling you who the other ones were. I don't know the exact number, but the group was around seven wineries.

Hicke: Was there quite a bit of interaction? You said your father went to a lot of meetings.

Parducci: Yes, there were always a lot of meetings. We were members of the Sonoma County Wine Growers Association.[1] My dad helped with the association. I don't remember when it was founded. I think Louis Foppiano was the first president. The association was quite involved in the prorate fight. I remember going down there to all their meetings with my father.

Hicke: Do you remember any of the issues?

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[1] In 1942 Louis Foppiano began the Sonoma County Wine Growers Association.

Parducci: No, I was too young to get involved in it. I don't remember.

Parducci Tasting Room

Hicke: Do you remember your father having a tasting room in the cellar? You told me that was when you first started to bottle your own wines. Can you tell me how that came about?

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Parducci: We started selling wine in 1933, in the tasting room underneath the house.

Hicke: Who came?

Parducci: Oh, tourists, because we were only four hundred yards off the road. We had a big sign down there, and people came in. That's why we're very well known in Canada, Oregon, and Washington, because we were the first tasting room in California, and the last one going out. Everyone stopped here. We sold tons of wine here [to people] from Oregon, Washington, and Canada.

Hicke: That was really early for any tourists to be tasting wine, wasn't it?

Parducci: Yes, but there were lots of people. Remember, those were dry states; you couldn't get wine into Oregon and Washington. I can remember many cases going out of our cellar. We used to put some in little barrels--five-, ten-, fifteen-gallon barrels. Lots of people used to stop in and buy our wine. So many people in Washington, Oregon, and Canada know Parducci very well. We still sell a lot of wine to our friends in the Northwest.

Hicke: How did your father, or whoever it was, happen to start this?

Parducci: The tasting room? It was another source of money.

Gift Shop in the Tasting Room

Hicke: You used that little cellar underneath the house?

Parducci: Yes, and then I remodeled that a half a dozen times, put shelves in there and glass counters. I built two tasting counters because one counter wasn't big enough to handle the people. Then my wife got involved in it and we started handling glassware--different kinds of bottles and things. We had the first gift shop in the whole [wine] country. We sold tons of gift items.

Hicke: When did you start that?

Parducci: About 1938, '39.

Hicke: It's a beautiful place, and Larry was telling me it was a very nice atmosphere for tasting.

Parducci: She worked in it for a long time. Oh, we had lots and lots of people.

Hicke: No other wineries around here were doing anything like that?

Parducci: No. We were the first ones to bottle wines, we were the first ones to have the gift shop, we were the first ones to plant all the premium varieties and make the first varietal wines.

Hicke: What did you have in your gift shop in the early days?

Parducci: The first things I had in the gift shop were the four-way bottles. Remember the four-way bottles?

Hicke: With the different spouts? Oh, yes.

Parducci: Okay, that's the first thing I put in there, and also the carafes. You remember the bottles that had a bowl and were wrapped, and they had a hole in the side of them that you could put ice into? I was the first one to bring those in here. And I was the first one to bring the Madeira baskets in here--wicker baskets from the island of Madeira.

Hicke: Oh, yes.

Parducci: Well, I brought those in by the carload. Then House Beautiful and other magazines bought some of the baskets. Then we began to see ads with our baskets, advertising towels, glassware, etc. My wife and I used to pack the baskets with wine. A lot of the lumber companies ordered them for gifts. We used to get the ones that held a whole case of wine, and we used to get ones that held two bottles of wine. All were packed with wine and glassware, and we sold hundreds of them. We worked very hard to make attractive gift packs.

Hicke: How did you find those, or where did you find them?

Parducci: I don't remember how I got the first one; I think it was when I was in San Francisco or someplace. I saw the baskets and made an inquiry. I found out we could order them directly from the island of Madeira, and we did. It got to the point where we were ordering a whole carload of them. That's a lot of baskets. We used to subcontract a lot of them, too. We used to sell them to people who packed other items in them. I always used demonstrate to our baskets when the tourists came in; I used to get up on top of the baskets and jump up and down on them to show how well-made and strong they were.

Hicke: Were they really that strong?

Parducci: Yes. They were all made out of willow and very strong. Beautiful!

Hicke: Are there any still around?

Parducci: Yes, I think Margarett has some. You can still buy them, but they're expensive. We used to pay something like two dollars a basket for the large ones. Then we used to get wicker bottle pourers. Remember the cradle, where you laid the bottle into it and it had a handle?

Hicke: Yes. Where did you find all these different kinds of bottles and bottle holders?

Parducci: San Francisco, in one of the Italian shops that brought them in from Italy. Then I found a way to bring them in myself. Then Margarett got involved in the gift shop, and she started going to the gift shows and buying items that were related to wine. Now the gift shop has an assortment of very nice merchandise, much of it related to wine.

We had a good business in our tasting room. My wife and I took care of all the billing, and I always used to write a note to every one of our customers who received a bill--a hand-written, thank-you note. We did that for years and years. I still do that. You know, I travel once a month--a week a month--and I'll write anywhere from fifty, sixty, or more letters a month to every one of the people I meet or come in contact with.

We were the first that I know of to have a gift shop combined with a tasting room in northern California. I don't know anybody else who had gift shop and a tasting room. It was successful for us.

Hicke: What about corkscrews?

Parducci: Oh, yes. We used to get our corkscrews until a couple of years ago from a man in New Jersey named Eli Barry. He still sells corkscrews. He's one of the people I met in Hoboken. I used to buy all the corkscrews from him.

Hicke: What kind of corkscrews?

Parducci: The one with the lever, you know? They all came from Italy, and we used to buy them by the gross--144 at a time. Eli is still in the business. As a matter of fact, he became a wine distributor of ours. The freight yards where we used to sell grapes were in Hoboken, New Jersey. They're no longer there; it's all warehouses now. I was shocked when I went to Hoboken last time to see all warehouses and no freight yards. Eli has his distribution warehouse there. We had a change in distribution, and I'm sorry to say that we are not associated anymore. He is a nice man.

Bottles, Corks, and Labels

Hicke: When you started bottling, you had to have corks, too.

Parducci: Yes, and you know how we bottled? We bottled with a hose and by hand. We used to pound the corks in with a rubber mallet. [laughter] Yes, it's funny. As a matter of fact, my wife found these bottles at my mother-in-law's; I gave

them to her many years ago. She didn't drink wine at the time, so she just stowed away the bottles and forgot about them. My wife found them recently and then gave them to me for my library.

Hicke: These Angelica bottles?

Parducci: Yes. The wine is very old. This was one of our first labels, year 1930 or thereabouts.

Hicke: That's a beautiful label.

Parducci: See these corks? I put those corks in.

Hicke: With the rubber hammer?

Parducci: Yes. That wine is about seventy-five years old. The wine came from A. Mattei, and it was fifteen to twenty years old at the time of bottling.

Hicke: Who designed the label?

Parducci: In the early years wineries or bottlers could buy stock labels which were selected from albums of samples. The trade name or mandatory was printed on the label by a printer.

Hicke: Tell me about the shape of the bottle.

Parducci: Shapes of wine bottles are traditional. These are German hand-blown bottles. Riesling bottles were available in different colors.

Hicke: They're very long and narrow, with the neck just barely sloping up to the cork.

Parducci: See the colors?

Hicke: One's green, one's brown--

Parducci: I have about seven colors. I have the blues, the moss greens, and all different shades. And there are no seams; they're hand-blown. Margarett just brought these to me. She found them down at her mother's.

Hicke: Why is the bottle shaped this way?

Parducci: It's a Riesling bottle. That's traditional for German white wines, and mostly Rieslings.

Here's one that came out in the forties.

Hicke: "Blackberry wine, bottled by Adolph B. Parducci." I didn't know you made any blackberry wine; I hadn't read anything about that.

Parducci: Well, we never made sweet wines, either. These came from A. Mattei. The blackberries came from Elk Grove.

Hicke: And you just bottled them? How many different wines did you do that for?

Parducci: Oh, we had about twenty different kinds. We had Angelica, White Port, Red Port, Red Muscatel, Tawny Port, Port, Muscatel, Tokay, Dry Sherry, Sweet Sherry, plus all the berry wines--Loganberry, Blackberry. That's why people used to drop in here; they loved the fortified sweet and berry wines, especially these wines here that were fifteen years old and older. We used to have barrels in the basement. We'd have about thirty barrels, and they all had spigots (I still have the spigots), and we had small glasses. Each barrel was labeled with the variety, and people would come in and go around and taste what they wanted. Then we'd have empty gallon bottles, and we'd fill the gallon jugs and charge them thirty-five or forty cents for it, and they'd go off as happy as can be. And no lead foils.

Hicke: It was just the cork, was it?

Parducci: Yes, and screw caps. We didn't even know what a lead foil was in those days.

Hicke: So you were acting as a sort of négotiant?

Parducci: For these people? No, more like a wine shop. When a customer drove up here from the highway, which took some doing, we wanted to have something that he liked--thus the different varieties. Then we also had wooden steps for the demijohns, which contained our dry wines. I had special glass tubes made for them with a pet cock, and this is where we had our sauterne, our burgundy, our Rhine wine, our clarets, and whatever dry wines we had. People would come in and want a burgundy, we'd let them taste it, fill

their jugs or ours, and another happy customer would leave our shop.

Hicke: Did you happen to save the old labels?

Parducci: Yes. We've got a collection of old labels--not very many; several of each is about it. We just threw them away in those days; we never thought about keeping anything for historical reasons. We discarded lots of old bottles and labels. It's sad, and I'm disappointed that we didn't keep more. Many of these bottles are collectors items now and fetch a lot of money.

Hicke: They're lovely bottles. Why were they made in so many different colors?

Parducci: I can't answer that. I don't know why they're different colors. But the blues are beautiful. There are light blues, dark blues, and then there are moss greens, reds. I have a display of an array of these bottles in my home and enjoy looking at them.

Hicke: I guess they're smaller than a regular bottle.

Parducci: It's a half bottle--half of a fifth.

Hicke: I wanted to ask you where you were getting your corks.

Parducci: In those days we used to buy corks from Schneir in San Francisco, who imported corks, and also Latchford. I think Schneir was the first one we ever bought corks from. They go back a long, long time. Later on in years we purchased a hand corker from them. Can you see the corker in that picture?

Hicke: You didn't have to continue on with the rubber mallet. [laughter]

Parducci: I thought the corker was in the picture, but maybe it isn't. Yes, isn't that the corker right here?

Growth of the Business

Hicke: You told me who all you sold bulk to, didn't you? Petri, Roma--

Parducci: Yes, we sold wine to Petri, Roma, [E & J] Gallo, the Christian Brothers--almost all the wineries in California that were bulk wineries.

Hicke: Obviously your sales were increasing every year. What were the implications of this new growth that was taking place?

Parducci: I think our business has grown slowly most of our career. When TMI [Teachers Management and Investment Company] bought the properties, the winery was growing. We were underfinanced to get any larger. My brother and I purchased our two brothers' and my father's equity in 1964. We didn't have the additional finances to keep up with our competition; we couldn't keep up with the trend. We were determined to do something. When TMI came along, they offered the financial help that we needed.

Hicke: One of the questions I think is interesting to try to establish is how long it takes to get a winery up and going. That's a little hard, maybe, because your father began early and had a head start.

Parducci: There would be no parallel to what it is today. This is why we can produce the wine that we're producing today. In a way, it's really a detriment in marketing, because when the consumers see the inexpensive prices, they don't think our wines have quality because they're too inexpensive. We purchased the land when it was very cheap; it was only a couple of hundred dollars an acre. We cleared the land with blood and guts and, like I said, we built the winery with blood and guts. We just improvised everything and bought used equipment; we never bought any new equipment. As a matter of fact, all the tanks we had in the winery were used tanks from the Petri Winery. The tanks were installed in our winery in order for us to make the amount of wine that we needed. So that helped us grow considerably because of the added cooperage.

As we kept making more money, we kept putting another addition onto the winery, or putting a new roof over the top of it, or buying a new piece of equipment, and kept

growing and kept growing--planting more vineyards. It was a slow, hard process.

Hicke: Do you have any sense of when it became profitable?

Parducci: I think it became profitable when my father ran it.

Hicke: So maybe ten years, or by the 1940s?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: Or even earlier?

Parducci: Earlier than the 1940s.

Hicke: If you don't count all of the labor that you put in by hand.

Parducci: Well, it had to be profitable because it kept getting larger. The profit had to come from somewhere, plus he had four boys who were working very hard, too.

Hicke: He didn't have to pay somebody to do that kind of work, so he probably turned a so-called profit much earlier than--

Parducci: I think you can go back to almost any first-generation family, whether it's in the wine business or the grocery business or anything else, and the harder they worked, the more they could make. Today that's not the way it is. Today they won't let you do that. See those arms [indicates his arm muscles in a photograph]? I lived in town, and after I went home I built another apartment; I worked until eleven or twelve o'clock at night, pounding nails. Well, you try to do that today, they'll have you in jail. No permits, and if I wanted to work all night long, I could work all night long and nobody would bother me. I did all kinds of things to make extra money. Today it is much more difficult.

When we were building this winery and wanted to build a wall, we went in there and built a wall. We didn't have fourteen inspectors telling us how to do it. It's an altogether different ballgame today. If you want to build a winery today, you've got everything against you, as you know. To build a winery today would be very difficult and almost unaffordable.

Hicke: You mean if you wanted to build it yourself?

Parducci: Well, you couldn't build it by yourself, to begin with. Everything must be engineered today. You have environmental laws, etc., to cope with. You have many obstacles. That's not the way it was when we were boys. If we wanted to work hard, we could make more money by working hard. If we wanted to take on a project, we just went ahead and did it. You can't do that [today]. I feel sorry for the young generation today that wants to start a business.

Hicke: I don't know how many people have as much ambition as you have had.

Parducci: There are a lot of ambitious people in this world today. However, a lot of them will never have the opportunity that I had when I grew up. We worked on a farm and had a practical education. We learned to survive. Today it's easy come, easy go.

Marketing in the Early Days

Hicke: Speaking of numbers, back in, say, 1940, what would be the percentage of bulk wine you sold as compared to what you sold in your tasting room?

Parducci: Ninety-nine percent of it was bulk wine. The tasting room sales were very small in comparison.

Hicke: But your tasting room kept growing, obviously.

Parducci: Yes. We used to crush four thousand tons of grapes or more, which equated to about six to seven hundred thousand gallons of wine. We probably sold ten thousand cases of wine in the tasting room each year. So you can see that in comparison our sales were very small in the tasting room.

Hicke: Why did you think it was worthwhile to keep up the tasting room?

Parducci: Because there was much more profit selling wine retail rather than in bulk. In bulk we would get eleven or twelve cents a gallon, some years thirty cents a gallon.

Hicke: That makes sense. There was clearly a lot of effort you put into that tasting room and gift shop.

Parducci: Yes, and it paid the bills, too. And inasmuch as we were going to go into the marketplace with our label, it brought our name in front of a lot of people who knew the Parducci family. So it helped. There are many tasting rooms in California today. Why do they have them? Because they are profitable; the wines are sold direct to the consumer. A lot of little wineries are selling everything they produce in the tasting room. I think now there are getting to be too many of them. However, I do believe tasting rooms help educate the consumer and give them an opportunity to taste many wines and to see the operations of most wineries.

Hicke: See what you started? [laughter]

Parducci: Yes. I'm happy to be a part of it.

John Parducci during interview, 1990.

III JOHN PARDUCCI AS WINEMAKER: THE 1940S AND 1950S

Appointment as Official Winemaker: 1948

Hicke: I have the date that you started in 1944 as winemaker, but obviously you were doing it much before that.

Parducci: Oh, I started in 1933 with my father. It was in 1948 that I had it by myself.

Hicke: How did that happen?

Parducci: Well, Dad always wanted to retire when he was a certain age. This particular year he just said he didn't like the amount of wine we were making; he didn't feel like he had the education to get into making a big volume of wine, and he decided he would just retire. And that's what he did. My father didn't know the chemistry of winemaking. He felt that I had the education to carry on and wanted me to take the responsibility of winemaking. I felt confident that I could handle the winemaking because I had the help of Dr. Twight and Mr. Angelo Petri, the owner of a very large winery, and his chief enologist. Dad liked to fish, he liked to bowl, and he liked to play golf, so that what's he decided to do.

However, we always kept my dad as the chairman of the board. I always looked up to him. Whenever we had a major decision, he was always involved in it. As a matter of fact, see that label over there? That dates that picture. That label was in the forties.

Hicke: What had happened during the war--'41-'45? What was the effect of the war on your winery?

Parducci: That's when we started making wine for Petri. My father didn't make wine after the war. Angelo was making a lot of wine during the war, and that's why we were crushing a lot of grapes. We made good wines. Actually, it made my father and family a lot of money. We crushed more grapes than we ever had in our history. The war helped my dad make more money.

Hicke: You were making it for the military?

Parducci: No. I think Petri made alcohol. They also had a big market for their wine, too. But I think all the press wine and all the lees wine and everything like that--they distilled it all. I don't know what the government used it for--gasohol or whatever, I don't know.

Hicke: Were you still selling the bottles from time to time?

Parducci: Yes, the tasting room went on.

New Equipment

Hicke: When you took over the winemaking in '48, what changes did you make, or what were your major problems? Did you plant any different grapes? I know you did in the fifties.

Parducci: We started buying equipment like this [points], a filter press; we started getting more modern. The old filters were nothing but asbestos-filled bowls, and you had to run the wine through these presses. When they got plugged up, you had do take all of the material out and wash it in a big pot. Then new filters came along, and we purchased them.

Hicke: What do you call these?

Parducci: That's a filter. As a matter of fact, that one there is owned by one of my friends in Texas right now.

Hicke: That's pretty small.

Parducci: That was big enough for us at that time. That's a filling machine [points]. I still have that filling machine.

Little Willy, my little Mexican, and I used that for years and years and years. That [points] is a bottling tank. That's another improvement. That's a stainless steel tank.

Hicke: What kind of tanks did you have before?

Parducci: They were all wooden tanks.

Hicke: Were they redwood?

Parducci: Mostly redwood, and we had some oak casks. We had twenty-two 5,500-gallon redwood open tops, and we had eleven 11,000's that were open tops for fermenting. We used to crush a lot of grapes, and it was all done by hand; every bit of it was shoveled by hand.

Hicke: Did you have to stamp down the cap?

Parducci: Yes. We had a man who did that, all by hand. We had a wooden punch about this big--about 6 x 6.

Hicke: And you plunged that in--

Parducci: Yes.

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Parducci: Then later on we would start using a pump. That was another change for the best, and one we greatly appreciated. We'd take a pump and circulate the wine. We would stand on a board that was on top of the tank and slowly circulate the must.

Hicke: You mean you pumped it by hand?

Parducci: No, this was an electric pump. That was about the time we had electricity.

Hicke: When did electricity arrive?

Parducci: Oh, I don't know exactly.

Hicke: While your father was still--?

Parducci: Oh, yes. I'd say in the early thirties--'34 or '35 or something like that.

Hicke: So it was early on.

Parducci: Yes.

We started adding better things. We purchased an automatic corker instead of a hand corker. In 1948 big things happened for us as far as improving our facility.

Hicke: What happened?

Parducci: It was in 1948 when we removed all of the old wooden fermenters and replaced them with stainless steel.

Hicke: How did you decide on or learn about new equipment? Did you go to equipment shows or talk to UC Davis people?

Parducci: We just kept up to date about new things. At that time we were also having some consulting done by Berkeley Yeast Laboratory, owned by Julius [H.] Fessler. We got in on the sterile filtration, yeast cultures, and a lot of new bottling techniques and new equipment. Julius is still alive, too. He doesn't have the Berkeley Yeast Laboratories, but he's still doing a lot of research on wine. I'm a very close friend of his.

Hicke: Joe Monostori?

Parducci: Yes. That's quite a story, because I used to know Julius many, many years before. Joe Monostori got to know him because he was the winemaker at New York Brotherhood Winery #1. That's how he met Julius.

Hicke: Is that the name of it--New York Winery #1?

Parducci: No, it's called [pauses to think] Brotherhood Winery.

Hicke: You meant it was the first winery in New York.

Parducci: Yes. By its Bonded Winery Number, I presume it was the first.

Grape Varieties and Wine Varietals

Hicke: The premium grape varieties that you were growing in '48--do you recall those?

Parducci: Yes. I wouldn't classify them all as premium varietals. We didn't have very many. We had French Colombard, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Alicante, and Carignane.

Hicke: That's all I've got listed for you.

Parducci: That's all there was. We used to sell claret, Rhine wine, and a lot of wines that you do not see today.

Hicke: At that point you weren't making fine varietals, were you?

Parducci: Well, Colombard is a varietal, Zinfandel's a varietal. A varietal is a wine made from the grape. But they were not the "Big Five" varietals. The "Big Five" varietals are Cabernet, Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc.

Hicke: I also have that you were very early making Petite Sirah as a varietal.

Parducci: Oh, yes. Concannon and the Parduccis I believe bottled the first Petite Sirahs in California. We sold Petite Sirahs in our tasting room in 1933.

Hicke: Made as a varietal?

Parducci: Yes, in demijohns and jugs.

Hicke: Was it a good seller?

Parducci: No, most consumers preferred lighter red wines. Some liked a heavy, big wine, and we'd sell them that. If they liked claret, we'd have a Zinfandel or some other blend.

During those years a lot of fortified wines were consumed. The first generation Europeans drank red wine mostly.

I didn't tell you this (and it should probably be off the record)--remember I told you we met the Scotto brothers and the Pios, who were our customers on the East Coast and

sold wine in gallons to their trade? We used to fill all the gallons by hand here, put them in four-gallon boxes, put them in a boxcar, and ship them. Well, they always wanted to furnish the labels. I just wish I had kept some of those labels. We would get labels from them called "Claret," "Barberone," "Barbaresco," "Barbera," "Burgundy," and other names, and we always used to use the same wine to fill all the bottles. [laughter] Finally one day the Scotto brothers called up and said, "You know, our customers are complaining. They say these wines all taste pretty much alike." [laughs] But most wineries used to do that.

Hicke: I've heard stories that wineries used to have a tube coming out, one going to a bottle saying "claret," and the other tube going to--

Parducci: Exactly. And I think you'll find that same thing today: if you put it in a brown bag, two-thirds of the customers don't know what they're drinking. [laughs] Anyway, those were the varietals that we had.

Hicke: Somebody apparently noticed.

Parducci: But they weren't sure, though! [laughter] It never came down to their telling us to stop doing it.

Hicke: In the 1950s you began planting some new varieties, right?

Parducci: No, we didn't do it until 1964.

Hicke: Okay. The '58 wines I have that you made are table, Burgundy, chablis, rosé, and sauterne. Then for varietals you had Barbera, Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Riesling, French Colombard, and Zinfandel.

Parducci: Those are some of the old varieties. No, we didn't make the Barbera until '75.

Hicke: Then you also made all these ports and muscatels and sherries?

Parducci: No, we never made any of those.

Hicke: Oh, you bottled those.

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: What else happened in the fifties? That was after you became the winemaker on your own.

Parducci: We started making wine for Christian Brothers then. That was in the late fifties, I believe it was; I'd have to go back in my records and take a look at when we first started with Christian Brothers. But there was an interim there where we made wine and just bulked it out; we weren't making anything particular. After our stint with Petri we were in limbo for three or four years, and then we started making wines for the Christian Brothers. When we started making wine for the Christian Brothers, we started making rosés. All the varietals that we had, which were small amounts, we kept for our account and used some for our tasting room.

Distribution

Parducci: And we had a distribution going then in the Pacific Northwest. One of my brothers had a route; he was delivering all of our wines up to the Oregon border and down to Cloverdale.

Hicke: How did this get established?

Parducci: Well, my dad actually started it. He bought a van and started delivering. As tourists started coming in here and people were asking for our wines, he started a route. Every week he went in a different direction, and we had a big business going. We were selling thousands of cases of wine.

Hicke: To--

Parducci: Markets--all the markets, grocery stores, and liquor stores.

Hicke: Your father actually packed the wine in the van?

Parducci: Yes, we had a van that held 150 or 200 cases of wine.

Hicke: Would he take orders on the first round and then bring them the second time?

Parducci: Yes, and he took a lot of telephone orders. He delivered wine as far as Arcata, all the way to Hopland and Cloverdale, and all up and down the coast--Mendocino, Fort Bragg. We had lots of customers up in the Garberville and Laytonville areas and Eureka.

Hicke: When did your brother take this over? Also in '48?

Parducci: Let's see, it was in '64 that we bought him out, so I'd say it was from '48 to about 1960.

Hicke: Which brother was this?

Parducci: That's Vernon, my third brother--the next to the youngest.

Hicke: What part of the month would he spend on the road?

Parducci: He was delivering every day.

Hicke: Every day?

Parducci: Well, yes. If he went to Eureka he'd be gone for two or three days. Then he'd come back, fill the truck up, and go in another direction. He'd be delivering all the time. Then in 1971 (I think it was), when we started our distribution--Vintage Wine Merchants--they started distributing everything.

Hicke: I was just going to ask you--were there not any distributors, or did you just think you did better to do it yourself?

Parducci: I don't think there were any distributors. Everything was shipped by freight--by truck; we shipped a lot of it by truck.

Hicke: But for some reason you thought it was better that he deliver a lot of it personally?

Parducci: Again, it's like it's getting back to the present--the one-to-one sales promotion. You meet the people, and that's the way you create your business.

Hicke: Establish a bond?

Parducci: That's right. So we did a lot of that.

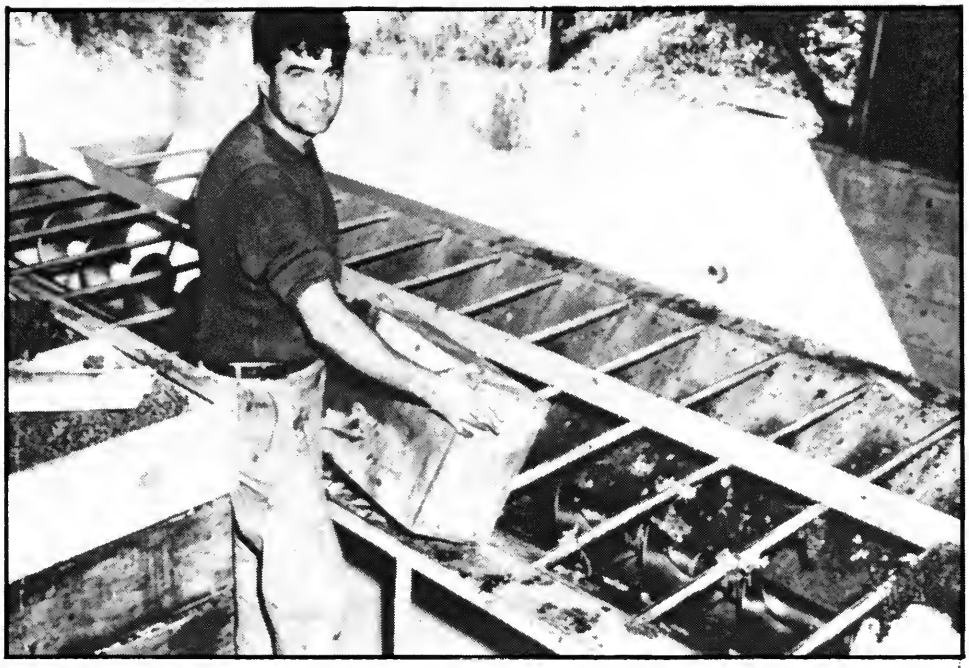
Hicke: What was Adolph, Jr., doing?

Parducci: Adolph, Jr., was the farmer of the family. I was the winemaker, George was a very brilliant c.p.a. [certified public accountant], Vernon was a good salesperson, and Adolph was a good farmer. As all families go, they just didn't have patience long enough to want to stay together. We'd have been winners if we had stayed together.

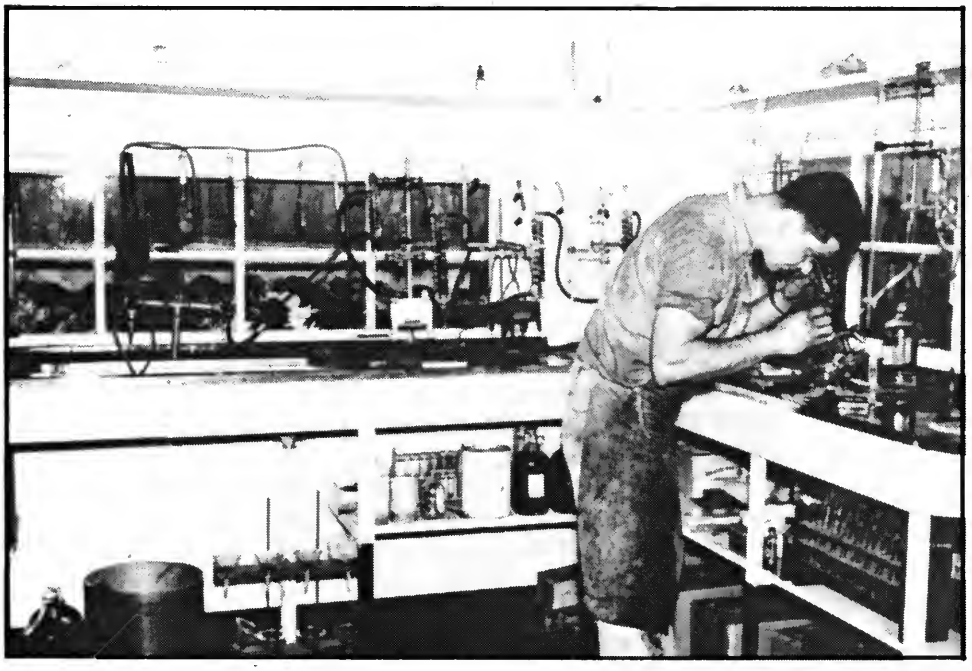
I was the one who did most of the work in the winery. They were too young, and George was going to school--getting his schooling in accounting. The other two worked in the fields, etc., and didn't care for it that much. That's how it was. If we'd have stayed together, we'd have been a real, real successful team.

Hicke: You had a lot of expertise there, between the four of you.

Parducci: Yes.



John Parducci during the crush at Parducci Wine Cellars (above) and studying yeast cells in Parducci Wine Cellars (below), circa late 1940s.



IV NEW DIRECTIONS AND GROWTH

John and George Assume Ownership of the Business: 1964

Hicke: So in the sixties you and George bought out the two other brothers.

Parducci: In '64. My two younger brothers were unhappy with the wine business, and my brother, being an accountant, was telling my father, "Dad, you'd better do something with this facility, because if something happens to you, we're back to being dirt farmers." So he gave us, the four boys, the winery at book value, and the two boys decided they didn't want to keep their share. So George and I decided to buy them out some way. We didn't have enough money to buy two lead pencils, but someone in the community from the banking business saw that George and I had a lot of potential and liked us. So unbeknownst to us--and we still don't know who it was--offered to loan us the money to buy out my two brothers and my father, and we did.

We had the winery full of wine. At that time wine was worth nothing; that's why they got fed up with it. There was no market for it. Then overnight the wine business went up and we were able to sell our wine and pay off our two brothers and our father. George and I were down to zero. At the same time we bought the Talmage Ranch, which was in a family estate. Someone helped us buy that, too.

We started doing a lot of expansion in the winery and making other improvements, and then we planted the Talmage Ranch with the help of the Christian Brothers. Then we decided, "Now that we've got all these grapes, we're going

to have to find some distribution." So we started looking for someone to market our wines. A young man dropped by here who had been drinking my wine for a long time and had just sold his share of the Refectory restaurants. A group of them had bought the Refectories and then sold out and gone into the Victoria Station [restaurants], and Fred decided not to. He was traveling up the highway on a vacation and stopped in at the winery here.

Hicke: His name is?

Parducci: Fred Holzknecht. We had a couple of glasses of wine, and I asked him what he was going to be doing, you know, now that he didn't have any obligations to the restaurants. He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, if you like my wine so damn much, why don't you sell it?" He thought about it a minute, and he said, "I'm going to think about it." A couple days later he calls up and says, "Hey, I think I will." So he and I started barnstorming all over California, and then he started expanding and took on a secretary. It was beginning to be profitable and more profitable. His company was called Vintage Wine Merchants.

Then we decided we should try to find a distributor in Southern California, and we interviewed the Myersons. Myersons is known today as probably the most successful and largest wine marketing company in the United States right now. They became our distributor in Los Angeles. Then we started marketing from state to state, and finally we got over all the United States. Then Fred sold out to a partner of his just a couple of years ago. Not satisfied with the new ownership of Vintage Wine Merchants, we took on Brown-Forman, and that's where we're at today.

Hicke: That's an interesting story. I want to ask you a little bit more about the Brown-Forman relationship, but let's go back to the sixties. Did I understand you to say that you didn't know who guaranteed your loan in the bank?

Parducci: No. Well, we were born and raised here, so it was somebody we grew up with. Most of the directors are well-to-do people, and we know all of them.

Hicke: It was a local bank?

Parducci: Yes, the local bank--the Savings Bank [of Mendocino].

Role of Banks in the Wine Industry

Hicke: Maybe you could just tell me in general what you think is the role of the banks in the wine industry.

Parducci: Well, Bank of America, I think, created a lot of problems for the wine industry in the early years. You know, the [Louis R.] Gomberg report predicted that wine consumption would go to eight gallons per capita. The banks were advising, "Plant grapes; we'll loan you the money." Of course this created high costs for land, and this is what got the wine business in a lot of trouble. I think the banking business did a lot of harm to the industry. It created all these surpluses, created all these wineries that are so expensive. I think there's going to be a big shakeup in the next couple of years.

Hicke: You mean some of the wineries will go under?

Parducci: I can't see how they're going to make it. How are they going to do it, paying $25,000 to $50,000 an acre and building all these big wineries? How are they going to recoup that money out of their investment? The market is supersaturated with wine. I think it's going to be very interesting the next two or three years.

Hicke: Do you recall anybody in particular in the Bank of America who was really pushing this?

Parducci: No. My father and A. P. Giannini were very close friends. My dad was a stockholder of the Bank of America. As a matter of fact, he did all his business in San Francisco, and everybody in the head bank there knew him.

I don't know if it was an individual--Mr. Giannini, I was told, was a very conservative person. To me, it's not a people's bank anymore; it's all the Ph.D.s who are really running the banks. It isn't a bank that's run on a one-to-one basis anymore. They created a lot of problems for the wine industry. I believe they created the high land values, for instance; there was no end to what they would loan on a piece of property, as long as you were going to plant grapes. And now it's going to catch up with a lot of people, and it's going to hurt everyone. It's not only going to hurt people who don't belong in the wine business,

but it's going to hurt all of us who have been in the wine business most of our lives.

Hicke: How is that?

Parducci: Oh, because we can't compete in the marketplace. Like right now they're dumping wine on the market because many wineries can't meet their loan payments. They're dumping wines on the market for twelve dollars a case now. How can we do that? We have at least twenty dollars a case in it. It's going to be very, very difficult for us to survive this economy. We'll do it, because we're family. We can whittle it down to bare bones, because what we have is paid for. However, it will still be difficult. We have people here who are hard workers and determined.

Then we have all these restrictions, making us put warnings on the labels about health hazards and sulfites, making it more difficult to market wine.

Hicke: Did your father get loans from Bank of America?

Parducci: Oh, sure.

Hicke: So in the early thirties the banks were--

Parducci: My dad always banked with Bank of America--always, up until the day he died. George and I didn't. All our loans were at a local bank, because we saw the handwriting on the wall. We saw where my father had built a relationship at the head bank where they knew him and he could get results or money whenever he wanted it; they knew all his history. But then we saw that changing very rapidly. We grew up here, we knew everybody here, and when we needed some money we went to the local bank, and in ten minutes we had it; we didn't have to fill out a whole bunch of paperwork in order to establish our credit. So we decided to go with a local bank and do all of our business with a local bank, and my father did his business at the Bank of America. We had kind of a split in the family. Some of my brothers banked at the savings bank, and others banked at the Bank of America. It was nothing personal; it was just the way it was.

I've been doing business with the savings bank all my life, and I see a big change coming there now, too, because the people my age are gone; they're retired or they have

died. Charlie Mannon, Sr., passed away, Mr. Bronley has passed away, Carl Dominick is not there anymore; so I'm going in there and I'm doing business with another generation. I'm doing the whole scenario over again. However, we're still going to do business there, because we're local and they're local, and they know us and we know them, and my children know them. We like it.

Hicke: Back in the forties and fifties, would you have to get short-term loans to cover a season, or would these be long-term loans?

Parducci: Usually a little bit of both. When my father bought this ranch--he always wanted to pay everything off as soon as he could, but I don't know if they were long term or short term loans or what they were. Whenever he borrowed money it was only because it was necessary for more equipment or for another building or something like that. Today it's pretty short term. We need it for things like buying grapes, and then we pay it back. Because we're not expanding anymore, and we don't have any plans to expand any more. Two years ago we built the big addition that you saw up there, and we were able to pay that off within two years because of accumulated funds that we had. We don't like to borrow a lot of money unless we can see where we can pay it off. That's what's hurting a lot of people--they're up to here.

We were born in a different time, that's the problem. I've gone through two wine depressions, and I don't want to go through any more of them.

Hicke: Not to mention a major economic depression.

Parducci: That's what two-thirds of the young people don't understand. They've never had a day of starvation. I can remember when we didn't know where we were going to get our next meal.

Planting Premium Varieties

Hicke: After you bought the winery, from what I've read I understand that you started off in some new directions for planting grapes.

Parducci: We went to all premium varieties for varietal wines; we planted all the first varieties because we could see the handwriting on the wall where the bulk market was going down the tubes. Big wineries were going out of business; as it is today, there are not large wineries you can sell bulk wine to anymore. Who are you going to sell it to? Almaden [Vineyards] is gone, Paul Masson [Winery] is gone, the Petris are gone, Italian Swiss Colony is gone. They're all gone! And every winery is taken over today--like the Beringers [winery] is planting its own grapes. All the major wineries are planting their own vineyards, or they're buying their vineyards; so they're not a source of wine anymore. So where are you going to sell this wine? The whole thing is changing so fast that you can hardly keep up with it.

Hicke: You saw that coming?

Parducci: Sure, we saw it coming. We saw it coming where you weren't going to be able to sell the bulk red wine that we had; you were going to have to put it in a bottle. That's what we decided to do and why we planted all these varietals. There were no premium varieties in Mendocino County, so we had to play it by ear--plant these varieties and make wine out of them and see if the wine turned out good, and go from there. And we're still playing around with planting different varieties and trying to find the right places to plant them, as most California wineries are doing. We're always playing around with different varieties. Now we're getting into the Italian varieties and the Rhone varieties; we're getting into all kinds of things--hybrids, etc.

I'm still interested in the wine business; I'm still about as young as I was fifty years ago. Otherwise I'd be bored with it, you know. There are so many things I want to do, I can't even begin to do them.

Hicke: That's wonderful. How did you decide what varieties to plant?

Parducci: In 1964? Well, with the help of the Christian Brothers--we were making wine for them at the time--they looked at the soil, and we decided these were the varieties we were going to plant, make the wine, and see the results. That's what we did, with the help of the Christian Brothers, and we thank them for it!

Hicke: How long did that take?

Parducci: Two years. We planted the whole 100 acres in two years.

Hicke: What did you plant?

Parducci: We planted Pinot noir, Beaujolais, Chenin blanc, Franken Riesling, Sêmillon, Flora, Chardonnay, and Cabernet. That's what we planted. Now that whole ranch, in one more year, will be completely replanted, and it will be all in Cabernet and all in Merlot. There won't be a white grape on it.

Hicke: Why is that?

Parducci: Well, because we find that that soil is more adapted for quality Merlot and Cabernet. We're going to use the Largo Ranch for whites, and the home ranch here for reds and whites. It's a matter of making the wine for a number of years, and also the market demand. I felt, and I'm advising all of my growers, that it's come to the time where we can't compete in California raising the white varieties, with the exception of the Chardonnay and the Sauvignon--

Grape Growing in Mendocino County##

Parducci: Most of our properties in Mendocino County are excellent and suited for red grapes. I think the North Coast counties produce the best red varieties. Why raise Chenin blanc here, when, say, the San Joaquin [Valley] or Fresno or Lodi can raise just as good grapes as we can with a lot more tonnage and less money? Why should we compete with any white varieties? We can raise the best red grapes. The Valley doesn't have the climate or the soil. So why compete with them? We don't have enough land up here to even--they could take Mendocino County and wipe it completely off the map, and nobody would even miss us, because we only produce about 30,000 tons. So why not raise the best red grapes we can?

The other advantage to red wines is that the way this market is, you can put red wine in a tank, and if you can't

sell it this year you can sell it next year; it'll get better and better the third and fourth year. At least you've got some leeway. With these whites, you can't do that. Furthermore, you're competing in a very tough market. For my money, my recommendation is to plant all reds, as much as we can.

Hicke: What is it about the soil at the Talmage Ranch that makes it so much better for red grapes?

Parducci: It's deep, and it's got a lot of rock in it. It's got a very slight slope and gets good sun exposure. It produces excellent red grapes. It's just the right type of soil. It's a deep soil, it's a light soil. We get good sugars. The whole Talmage area is a good area for red grapes. It's been proven the best for the last eighty years. The finest red grapes have come out from that area. So that's what we're going to do. Plus Cabernet and Merlot, wines that I think are going to be around for a long time. Although we make good Chardonnays, I wouldn't advise a grower to plant this variety. Statistically there are too many acres planted in areas that can out-produce us in quality and quantity.

You take a hill like this up here, and it's a shame to plant it with white grapes. It's number one bench, it's high up on a plateau, it's very marginal soil and a light producer. It'll produce most red grapes with good quality. We've been making excellent Zinfandels off that hill for years and years and years.

Hicke: Are you saying that the appropriate soil and climate is harder to find for reds than whites?

Parducci: Yes. I think it's a combination of the soils. Also, don't forget that Mendocino County produces the lowest ton per acre in California; we're only 3.5 tons to the acre. With these yields our reds have a lot of flavor, aromas and complexity. However, it's difficult to make a living producing these kinds of yields. We've decided to pay a premium for those grapes and have the grower raise them, rather than buy grapes that are raised in the lowlands and produce 7 or 8 tons to the acre.

I don't think you're going to see the small farmers and marginal vineyards around very much longer. It will be difficult for them to survive. Besides the high taxes and

urban development, land prices are becoming too expensive to produce grapes. How can we survive? I'll bet you that in ten years we won't be able to operate this winery. Look what they're doing--building houses, and they're complaining about the smell already. They're complaining about the tourists; they're complaining about everything. Sebastiani [Vineyards] is a good example; they were forced to leave their winery in Sonoma.

Hicke: I guess what you're saying is that Mendocino County has a special niche for wines, but it also has a special challenge.

Parducci: The challenge is urbanization. That's what's going to be our problem. Our acreage in Mendocino County is about the same as when I first moved here--number of acres. What's happened is that because of the rise in grape prices, pear and prune orchards were pulled out and grapes were planted. But I wouldn't buy a lot of grapes from those vineyards.

Hicke: What did they plant?

Parducci: They planted Chardonnays, Sauvignon blancs, White Zinfandels (Zinfandels for White Zinfandel).

Hicke: Did you get any help from UC Davis when you started this?

Parducci: Oh, sure, they've always been helpful. Oh, yes. I've disagreed with UC Davis, sometimes up to the point where they established a test plot in Hopland. I said to them, "You know, you're making your recommendations from Davis, and that doesn't mean a hill of beans for what's going to happen in Mendocino County." So they established a test plot down in Hopland, which was a big help, but then they couldn't afford to keep it up any longer and they pulled it out.

We get a lot of help from the University at Davis regarding right rootstocks, control of diseases, and help in the winery when we have problems with fermentations and things like that. And they're doing research every day, developing new rootstocks that are resistant to phylloxera, trellising techniques, and many, many other things. We also have Fresno State [California State University, Fresno], a tremendous help to the wine industry and the grape growing industry.

Hicke: Can you remember any particular incidents where they were of special help to you?

Parducci: No, I can't recall any at this moment. We planted all AXR1 with their recommendation, and now it's becoming a--

Hicke: You haven't got phylloxera here, have you?

Parducci: We have it in Lake County. I don't know if we have it here or not; I'm not qualified to answer that. I've seen some vineyards around that I would be very suspicious of, but I don't know of anybody who has really had it checked out. We have it in Lake County on our AXR1 rootstock.

Have they been helpful with me? [long pause] I can't remember anything in particular, but I've never asked them for a lot, either. I know a lot of people have.

State Legislation

Hicke: In 1965 there was something called the Williamson Act--the land conservation act.[1] Did that impact your farm here?

Parducci: We put part of our ranch which is rangeland under the Williamson Act, but we haven't really done a lot with it.

Hicke: So that's just set aside? It's taxed at--

Parducci: Yes, for range. We don't have livestock on it, and we're supposed to have some livestock on it. As a matter of fact, we do have livestock, but it's not our own livestock; we rent it out for livestock. It's not suitable for vineyards, and no income, so you more or less have to put it under that act. It would be difficult to pay taxes on it; there isn't much money in livestock at this time.

Hicke: So that act was somewhat helpful to you?

Parducci: Yes, I think it was. It helped a lot of people.

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[1] California Land Conservation Act. 1965 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch 1443. A. B. 2117.

Hicke: Do you have any kind of relationship with your legislator?

Parducci: Well, [we do] if one stays in office long enough so that we get to know him! I know most of them. I know the governor; I've met the governor. President Reagan I know.

Hicke: I saw your picture taken with him.

Parducci: Yes. But I don't get involved in politics, because I found that you can't please everyone. I've never run for a political job, and I never would, for that reason. I've had many close friends who were in that rat race, and they finally give it up. People that you want in the courthouse or to listen to what you have to say are too busy making a living. It's the people who are agitators and have all the time in the world that are always the ones sitting there lobbying for everything, you know. With my temperament, I couldn't take that.

Hicke: I think you're doing very well where you are.

Parducci: Environmentalists are something else. I can't agree with a lot of their arguments.

Educating the Consumers

Hicke: Let's see--you told me about your distribution growth and how that all came about.

Parducci: You know, distribution is a very interesting part of my life, because I've traveled now since 1971. People all over the United States and, as a matter of fact, outside the United States, know me. I find that there's not enough of an educational process in regards to wine in the United States that educates the consumer. We, as Europeans, had wine with every meal. I sometimes blame the young winemakers, and I was a young winemaker one time, for making wines that the consumers are not enjoying. In other words, those of us who go into a store to buy a bottle of Chardonnay can't find two bottles that are anything alike. Or two red wines. I think that's wrong. Winemakers are trying to make something out of a grape that doesn't taste like wine. They're putting it in this barrel and that

barrel, malolactic fermentation, barrel fermentation, etc. People don't know what the hell they're drinking anymore.

Whereas we were brought up with a bottle of wine on the table with every meal, and it was all red wine. We never had a bottle of white wine in this household until 1964. The wines that we used were made out of Zinfandel, Carignane--a combination of four different varieties of grapes--and it was nice and fruity. It went with Mom's pasta and her fish and her salad. My dad would put it on his strawberries and his peaches. Now here we are, we're snorting and we're sniffing and we're smelling fifteen kinds of things in a glass of wine, and people are wondering what's going on. We need to educate the consumer, not intimidate him.

Most of our vendors need educating also; they don't know what they're selling. I walked into a famous liquor store recently and saw eighty-some Chardonnays in a row, and that many Cabernets. They were priced from $1.99 up to $50. Now, the consumer walks in the store, and can anybody tell her why one is $1.99 and some up to $50? She doesn't know why. She doesn't know why one of them is sweet, and why another one is high acid, and another one is butter-like or oakey. She doesn't understand why they are different. They're all Chardonnays; they all say Chardonnay on the label.

Then we have the same variety of wine labeled either Fumé Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc. I was taught that when you make a Sauvignon Blanc in stainless steel and it's off-dry, it should be labeled Sauvignon Blanc. If you put it in a barrel, where it gets a smokiness, and is relatively dry and wood-aged, it's supposed to be labeled Fumé Blanc. Well, now all the Fumé Blanc producers are going back to labeling it Sauvignon Blanc. So now when the consumer walks in and picks up a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc off the shelf, she doesn't know if it's sweet, if it's barrel-aged, or whatever. And the consumer just says, "The hell with it; I'll bring home a cooler or flavored water or something else." That's what's happening in our business today.

Drinking and driving is another problem that we have. Restrictions and such being as they are, we are all afraid to drink a half a glass of wine or any other beverage because of the liabilities. It's getting ridiculous.

Another problem that we have--I just came back from North Carolina, Kentucky, Washington (Seattle) and Portland, Oregon, and I saw so many wines in the marketplace that were over the hill. Whoever buys those wines is never going to drink wine again. They're all standing up, many are oxidized or maderized, White Zinfandels are brown and off color; they're gone. I walked into Cost Plus and Liquor Barn in North Carolina, and it was one city block square, wines from all over the world. Now, you tell me--are they going to turn over all of those wines in a year's time? I don't think so. However, somebody's going to buy it sooner or later. That's why when I travel and I see a bottle of my white wine on the shelf that's four years old, it upsets me, and my marketing people know it.

Hicke: What do you see as a possible solution? Or do you see any solution?

Parducci: You've got to educate people--wholesalers and retailers. (This is off the record, because I'll get in up to my ears.) Most vendors, when you walk into the store, will say to you, "What's the deal today?" They want to know how deep they're going to get into your pocket. So you give them a big discount, they put the money in their pocket, put the wine up on the shelf, and don't do one damn thing to sell it. They couldn't care less! These are the kinds of people who need to be educated. Like this salesman running around with samples in the back of his car in 120-degree weather--I'm going to be calling a wine writer and let him taste my wine, and the salesman has had this wine rattling around in the back of his car for a week. They treat it like a rock; there's no educational process that tells him how to handle wine.

When the Wine Institute got rid of the Wine Advisory Board, I think they made the biggest mistake they've ever made in this wine business. I belong to a lot of civic and fraternal organizations, and I used to put on programs with educational videos and materials the Wine Advisory Board furnished us. We would have wine tastings, and county and state fairs were furnished with a wine travelogue, posters, and wine information pamphlets, etc.

Hicke: People seem to be very interested. I don't know why they aren't getting educated. But you're talking about the distributors?

Parducci: I'm talking about wholesalers, distributors, anybody who relates to wine. In all of my presentations I try to inform my audience. I take a bottle and pull the cork out and ask, "Do you feel that little hump there? Know what it is?" Here's a person selling my wine who doesn't even know that these bottles all have a little ridge in the middle of them so the wine will go up so far, and that's where it's supposed to stop. I ask, "Do you know how old a cork has to be?" "No." I say, "You look at a cork; it should have seven rings." They don't know that. I ask them, "Do you know that some dry, white wines have a lot of CO [carbon monoxide] and can't be subjected to extreme temperature changes? You know what happens to it? It's just like soda water; as it warms up, pressure starts to wet that cork, and once the cork's wet it doesn't have a seal anymore."

I ask, "Do you know how long it takes to buy dead-leaf green bottles for our market? We bottle most varieties once each year because some of these bottles are manufactured only once a year." "Oh, I didn't know that." How about labels? "Did you know it takes us six or eight months to get labels?" "Oh, we didn't know that." They think it's like pushing a button and out it comes. They don't know that wine is a living thing, and that it all takes time. We have to age Cabernet two to three years; they don't know that. They don't know a damn thing about the wine business.

Hicke: That seems to explain why you do a lot of traveling. This is part of your own effort to talk to people and have personal contact?

Parducci: I try. Sure, today you sell wine on a one-to-one basis. There are so many millions of bottles out there that if you didn't get out there and make yourself known, they'll forget you the day after you leave. That's the way it is. But you've got to get that first bottle off the shelf. That's what I keep telling Brown-Forman: "You're spending your money in the wrong direction. You've got to spend it to educate the consumer." You know that when those bottles are gone off that shelf, Mr. Storeowner is going to work his butt off to get those bottles back there, because they're moving off the shelf.

It's just like the health benefits of wine. How many places do you see the health benefits of wine advertised? You don't see it very much. Those of us in the industry are aware of it, but the consumer's not seeing it.

The Italians drink forty gallons per capita, the French drink forty gallons per capita. Do you see them all dying? Yes, they're dying--ninety to a hundred years old. And the French and Italian wine industries have no tolerances for sulphur; they can legally go up to 300, 450 parts per million. It doesn't seem to hurt them. Look at me, I've been in and out of tanks when I could hardly breathe because of the sulphur gas. See all that stuff [on my hands?]? That's tallow; I used to crawl in and out of tanks when I had to rinse them down. The odor of sulphur was so strong that I had to run out the manhole and put my head out. I'm seventy-three years old and it didn't hurt me.

But the consumer listens to all this propaganda, and that's what I mean by an educational process. I couldn't hazard a guess as to what the final outcome of our wine business will be in the future, with all the warning labels and restrictions that we now have.

V PARDUCCI WINES AND WINEMAKING

[Interview 2: July 31, 1990]##

Making Wines in the Early Days: Red Wine

Hicke: I thought we might start this morning by talking about the different wines and winemaking, and your methods and how they've changed over the years. For instance, in the 1960s you made wines without any fining or filtration.

Parducci: Yes. In the old days we had open tank fermentors, and our equipment was very primitive. Most wineries, I believe, had the same procedure. We crushed our grapes in tanks through a de-stemmer crusher. What this piece of equipment did was to remove the stems and crush the berries. You have to remember that it was all red wine; we made very little white wine, if any.

Hicke: Now we're back in the forties?

Parducci: The forties was all red wine. We made our first white wine in 1946 or '47, which was a French Colombard. The rest of the time it was all red wine. Red wines were very simple to make in those days, because we made it for the bulk market. You didn't have to worry about tannins or finishing the wines or anything else; they just went out in the bulk market. The ones that we sold in the tasting room were aged in our old tanks for a long time--at least three years--before we bottled them and put them in the marketplace.

Hicke: What kind of tanks were these?

Parducci: They were 1,200-gallon ovals, 4,000- and 6,000-gallon redwood tanks. In three years most of the deposits were naturally precipitated, so we were able to bottle the wines without a lot of sedimentation, primarily because they were consumed right away. They didn't sit on the shelf for years; people bought them in gallons, took them home, and drank them. Very few of our wines in the early years were even found in markets or on the shelf. Everything was very simple, and wines were consumed as soon as they left the winery.

Changes Starting in 1948

Parducci: Then in 1948 we started making some of the white wines. We controlled the temperature by putting coils into the tanks and running cold water through them.

Hicke: You put the coils inside of the tanks?

Parducci: Yes. They were plates, or they were just coils, and we ran cold water through them to keep the must cool. In later years, when George and I bought the two brothers and Father out, we went into commercial refrigeration. So the technology changed a lot, from redwood to stainless steel, to filtration and fining, and all those kinds of things, because we were going into the marketplace with our wines, which was in 1968. We planted the vineyard in '64, so it was in '68 that we made the first wines, and marketed them in '69.

Then the whole world changed and we got into bottling equipment. From that, right there behind you--the hand bottling equipment--to the semi-automatic, and then to the automatic, where we're at today. Technology not only changed as far as the equipment is concerned, but in winemaking, too. We had to make the wines lighter in style. We started doing a lot of varietal production, label changes; all kinds of things were changed.

As far as the wine technology was concerned, it was pretty much the same up until, oh, a few years ago, when I started making wines a lot lighter, wines that were drinkable earlier and full of fruit. That's what we're

still doing today. When you buy a bottle of our wine off the shelf, you can take it home and drink it. Also, it'll last a long time because it's not overly processed; it's very natural when it goes in the bottle, and we use good grapes from Mendocino County or Lake County. This is where we're at today.

Ports and Sherries

Hicke: To go way back, I've read the story about how your father baked the ports and sherries.

Parducci: I didn't know what was going on in those days because I was too young, but I remember the way he used to make port. He'd put it in barrels, and then he'd roll the barrels out on a concrete pad and cover them with straw. What would happen with the straw was that it maintained the heat at a constant temperature, and it helped bake the sherries and facilitated the aging process of the ports.

I still have some of those ports from 1949, and they're delicious. And, of course, in those days it was all done with illegal brandy. They made their own brandy and fortified their wines. I've tasted some of the brandies made in those days, and they were delicious. They were very good, so they knew what they were doing. Of course, they were done in such small quantities also.

Hicke: How long did you continue to make ports and sherries?

Parducci: That was the only one we ever made. Then we made another one in '66. I've wanted to make ports the last three years, but we have been so involved in our crush and bad weather that we just couldn't find time to do it. And we had excellent grapes to make fantastic ports the last three years, because they were very high in sugar and good acids and everything. We just couldn't find the time to do it. But we're going to make another one, and I hope it will be soon. We're doing many experiments right now with new varieties. We've got so many new varieties planted and so many new blends of red wines that I just can hardly wait to see the results.

Developing New Products

Hicke: When you decide to do a new wine, what's the motivation for developing a new product?

Parducci: I have always been interested in new products. That's why we experiment with different varieties. For one thing, it's a challenge. However, I think you have to make new wines from your own area on your own soils and in your own style before any final decision can be made about the quality of the wine or the area. I remember when Dr. Winkler said that Mendocino County would never be a famous producing county, and here we are. So you just can't make a judgment until you do it. We decided to plant the right varieties, and our research and experiments proved that we can produce fine wines.

Hicke: What did he base that on?

Parducci: Probably the climatic conditions and the soils. I don't really know what the basis was, but I know that the university never did recommend Mendocino County for a premium grape-growing area. It's just like--I have a lot of hybrids planted. Why do I have hybrids planted? I helped start a winery in Texas, La Buena Vida, with Dr. Bobby Smith, who has hybrids, and he now also has *viniferas*. I've made wine from Chambourcin, Chancellor, Landot, Seyval blanc, Rayon d'Or, and I was impressed with a lot of those varieties. I want to use them in many trial blends.

When the fad started here in California--you know, the low-alcohol wines--winemakers were coming up with the de-alcoholization process and the vacuum process and everything, and I said, "You can't do that. You can't take a green grape and wind up with a good product. You've got to have a product that has good balance with low sugars to produce a product with low alcohol." The hybrids will ripen between 14.5 and 15, a lot of them. So that's when I decided I was going to plant hybrids and make wine from a hybrid. I found that what happens in Texas is no way going to happen in California. So I've got an acre of them planted, and they are now producing experimental wines for me.

Hicke: These are the French hybrids that you planted?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: Where did you get those?

Parducci: I got them from Bobby Smith from Texas. I've made blends with those wines and brought them back to Texas, and everyone was impressed with the quality. I blended them with Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and Cabernet, and they were outstanding bottles of wine. Well, I want to pursue this a little further. I want to take hybrid wines and make blends with *vinifera* wines. I hope that the experiment is successful. We have to try it out to determine the potential of the product. I have four different clones of Pinot noir planted, and I will have five different appellations with Pinot noirs. Two of the appellations have not had any grapes in them at all, and they're all in Mendocino County, and some are Region I's.[1] There was not one wine grapevine planted there previously, and now we've got an acre planted in two different areas.

Hicke: You mean there wasn't a grapevine planted there until you planted them?

Parducci: That's right. Because no one's tried it. Being classified as Region I, it may raise great Pinot noirs. We've got Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer planted there, about thirty or forty vines of each, and we're going to make wine from them, look at the numbers, and see what we come up with. I have four different clones of Nebbiolos planted, we have four different port varieties planted, we've got some Sangiovese planted, we've got some Mourvèdre planted. All these are varieties that have never been grown here, and we're going to see what potential they have. We're going to look at the numbers--the pH's, sugars, when they ripen, etc.--and then make some wine of different blends.

But, you see, that takes a long time. So what I'm doing right now, I'll probably never see the results. I just hope someone will carry on with the experiments, and if I know the new breed of winemakers, they will! We haven't even scratched the surface regarding the planting

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[1] Grape-growing areas are classified into five regions of heat summation. In Region I, the coldest, the growing season is short, temperature is low, and only early-ripening varieties will mature.

of new varieties and blends of the new and old. Maybe coming up with something, a new variety, will create more interest in wine and we'll have more people drinking it. Right now it appears to me that we're stagnated.

Primavera and Flora

Hicke: I think in the seventies you had something called Flora, and then Primavera. Where did those come in?

Parducci: Primavera was the name of a May wine that I made [1972]. We had a contest, and we offered the lady (we had it at a women's organization) who came up with a name that we liked a case of wine every month for a year. Primavera was the name that we selected, and after we marketed the wine we found out that it was a name that was copyrighted several times. We found that it was a world-famous artist's painting and used by several other companies. We didn't realize it. Primavera means "spring" in Italian.

Hicke: Is that often a problem? Do you now investigate names?

Parducci: Yes. Now we research all names through the Bureau of Copyrights and have them checked out. We just changed Primavera to May Wine.

Hicke: Why did you make this wine?

Parducci: Because we found that the women liked a sweet wine. We developed this recipe while Joe Monostori was here. In Europe the May wine is a very, very popular beverage for the holidays. They take Moselle and steep woodruff, which reminds me of tea leaves, and then they float strawberries on top of it. We did the same thing. We steeped a blend of our white wines in with woodruff, and then instead of using strawberries we used strawberry juice and made a blend of that. It was delicious, and everybody loved it. But it's so expensive to produce that it was difficult to market.

Hicke: How long did that last?

Parducci: Oh, we produced the wine for six or eight years, I guess. A lot of women's organizations were using it as an aperitif

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San Francisco Chronicle

THE WINE PAGE

WINE OF THE WEEK

Parducci Cellarmaster Series 1987 Pinot Noir

$8

Winery and vineyards: Mendocino County

John Parducci shows here why he should be declared a living historic treasure. He has blended with great finesse and skill to produce a delightful wine, light in color like a very deep rosé or those wines called *clarete* in the Rioja region of Spain. The wine opens with a rush of black cherry bouquet on the nose, followed on the palate by more cherry and a light blackberry-cassis combination. A champion wine in a Pinot Noir style that should win a lot of friends for this varietal.

LARRY WALKER

for their bridge afternoons. They loved it. We're getting a lot of calls for it right now.

Hicke: How about Flora?

Parducci: Flora was one of the varieties we planted on the Talmage Ranch on the recommendation of the Christian Brothers. Do you know the history of the Flora?

Hicke: No.

Parducci: The Flora was developed by the University of California at Davis by Dr. [Harold Paul] Olmo for the [San Joaquin] Valley. They wanted to replace the French Colombard in the Valley with another variety that would upgrade their quality. The Flora is a cross between a Gewürztraminer and a Sémillon, so some years it's pink and some years it's not pink, and some years it leans towards the Sémillon character and other years to the Gewürztraminer.

We planted eight or ten acres of Flora. We made a dessert wine out of it because it gets very high in sugar and produces a lot of grapes. We ran across a couple of cases of it the other day in the library--1974--and there were some leakers, so we opened one and tasted it, and it's delicious. Here it is, sixteen years old, and it's still enjoyable to drink. The tonnage and the acreage in California is steadily going down because the market doesn't seem to like it, and the quality is not the best for white wine production.

Hicke: Why?

Parducci: It doesn't blend well.

Hicke: Too specialized?

Parducci: No one specializes in Flora, that I know of. There used to be. It's spicy and it's coarse; it doesn't have any delicacy at all to it. It's a very coarse grape. It's very difficult to use because it doesn't blend well with Sauvignon blanc or Chenin blanc or anything like that because it has a spiciness and a lot of tannin. So it just hasn't made it.

Hicke: How long do you do something like that before you decide it's going to go or it isn't going to go?

Parducci: Oh, within a period of ten years you can pretty much tell whether it's going to be around or not. Our Flora is now twenty-six years old, and it just breaks my heart to pull it out. But I think next year it's going to go out.

Hicke: Oh, you still have some?

Parducci: Oh, yes, we've got the original vineyard.

Hicke: What are you doing with it?

Parducci: We're putting in a vintage white. Our vintage white has some Gewürztraminer in it to give it a little floral [taste], so it fits there. But there again, it's a no-profit item. There's very little profit in the generic wines.

Jug Wines

Hicke: That's one of the questions I wanted to ask you. How do the jug wines compare with the premium wines for profitability?

Parducci: There's very little profit in jug wines. You're better off selling in bulk, if you can sell in bulk. There's just no money in jug wines. That's why large wineries have gone out of the jug business. You've got to pump it out there by the trillions of gallons to make a nickel.

Hicke: Why are you making it?

Parducci: There are a lot of reasons why we make it. If you can get it in a restaurant as a house pour, then maybe they will put on some of your varietals on the wine list. Also people can better afford to have a glass of wine. Also maybe you can educate people to drink wine. There are a lot of reasons for it. A lot of people can't afford to drink premium varietals every day; they can't go out and drink a fourteen-dollar bottle of Chardonnay every day, whereas these wines can fit their needs.

Hicke: So you might consider it something of a loss leader?

Parducci: That's exactly what it is, and also it's a home for press wines and nonvarietal wines. Suppose you have a Sauvignon Blanc that is in excess or you don't want to put in a fifth. Maybe it's too herbaceous or nondescriptive, or just not good enough to put in a bottle. Well, you've got a good place to put it. Most of the so-called jug wines were produced down in the Valley, the warmer regions that were producing Thompson Seedless [grapes], Malagas, and other varieties. Some of the grapes that were left over from the raisin harvest were also made into wine. All of this plus high yields produced surplus of their wines.

We can't compete completely with these grapes, because of the different markets they have and tonnages they produce. So we're out here competing in the jug wine market with wines produced from low-yield vineyards and varietals. Our red wine is blended with some Cabernet in it and our white wine with some Chardonnay. That's why they consistently win medals!

Hicke: Yes, your jug wines are pretty well received, aren't they?

Parducci: But try to impress the consumer. The consumer doesn't know the difference in the quality, so it still becomes a very difficult sell.

Special Tawny Port

Hicke: You made something called Special Tawny Port.

Parducci: It was a port that we had in a tank. We had three ovals that were my grandfather's, numbers 31, 32, and 33. When we had the flood in '66, one whole side of the winery's concrete wall collapsed, and a big chunk fell on top of the oval that was filled with port and crushed it. So we had to bottle the wine and empty the tank. This wine had been in this tank for many years.

Tawny port comes from ruby port. When a port's new, it's called ruby port, and if it's a vintage port, it's bottled within a year and a half and put in the bottle immediately. A red port is just when it's first made. If you leave port in a barrel for a long time, it becomes

tawny in color, so that's where you get the tawny. I don't particularly like tawny port. I have a lot of ports in my wine collection, and I don't have one bottle of tawny. I like the vintage ports; I like them when they're on the sediment, and they're big and rich. Tawny is very smooth, but it's very light. You can actually drink more of them, I guess, but I don't drink many sweet wines anyway. But that was the only tank of port that we had.

Pink Fumé: 1973

Hicke: Pink Fumé is another one I read about.

Parducci: That was made from Sauvignon blanc with a little bit of red wine to give it a pink color. That's why it was called Pink Fumé. That became very popular, too. But, you see, marketing companies won't sell this kind of wine; so they die on the vine. People come to the tasting room and they love it, but you can't get marketing companies to sell a new wine. Plus the fact that the retailer doesn't have any more room on the shelf to put all these different wines. Consumers look at a label like that, and they say, "What is this?" Like pink Chardonnay that's coming out--it's ridiculous. What usually happens is that some winery makes a mistake in blending, and the wine finds its way into a bottle for sale under some new name. What are consumers going to think about pink Chardonnay? They will ask, "Now, where does that come from?"

Hicke: So much for product development! [laughter]

Parducci: Well, let's not use Chardonnay, the queen of the wine world, for these experiments. Use something else.

Effects of State Legislation on Alcohol Percentages

Hicke: In 1971 there was an amendment to a state law that allowed port to be made at 18 percent. Did that affect you?

Parducci: No. As a matter of fact, it helps everybody.

Hicke: But you weren't making port then?

Parducci: No.

Hicke: Then in '79 an amendment lowered the minimum for table wines to 7 percent.

Parducci: That helped the industry, because lots of us were making botrytis wines, and we weren't able to market them because they were too low in alcohol. The government didn't have any provisions to sell those kinds of wines until Edmeades in Anderson Valley, I think it was, went to the government and had that law changed so we could bottle our wines that were low in alcohol. So now look at all the nice dessert wines that we have. I think it helped the industry. It cleared it up, as a matter of fact. This incident helped create a whole new style of wines that we all now enjoy.

Hicke: How did it change your wines?

Parducci: It didn't change anything at this winery, except that when we did make dessert wine--the botrytis wines--we were able to do it and sell it. Before, you weren't able to do it; if it was under 11 percent you couldn't sell it. Now we can.

Yeasts

Hicke: I wanted to ask you about yeasts. What do you prefer, and how do you decide?

Parducci: We're doing a lot of experimentation with yeasts today. I never used any yeast in all my life, up until way late in the fifties. We always used the natural yeast, and I see now that a lot of people are going back to it again. I'm in a way religious to the old style of winemaking. I always said that every year we have a different year. I always feel that God puts something on those grapes each year to ferment into good wine. We're getting so sterile in our winemaking and using yeast cultures that sometimes I think we defeat our purpose. The Italians have been using the natural yeast for years and years and years, and they're still doing it. I see now that a lot of wineries in California are doing it again.

As a matter of fact, there is a lot being written about the experiments wineries are doing with the natural yeasts. I think that every year there are certain flora on the skins that Mother Nature puts there to take care of that grape, because of the different climatic conditions each year. In my opinion, I think there is a lot of improvement to be made in this field.

Hicke: Introduce an artificial--

Parducci: This is probably why we're getting a lot of stuck wines. It's a very controversial thing at this point. But I'm thinking about going back to the wild yeast. As I mentioned before, we used to have twenty-two 5,500-gallon tanks and eleven 11,000's. I always used to watch my tanks fermenting. The pomace cap was only about a foot thick.

I'd watch for a tank that was fermenting very slowly and very evenly, and then I'd take that tank and use it to start another tank, etc. Mid-season I would do away with that as a starter tank and look for another. That's the way I made all my wines. I don't think any winery in California used yeast at all until Berkeley Yeast Laboratories came along. At this time they provided us with an agar start in a bottle. You had to take that sample and develop it up to enough volume to start your first tank. Well, everything was so primitive in those days that if you didn't carefully sterilize your juice under sterile conditions, you were not sure whether you had cultured yeast or wild yeast. I don't think we really had a positive way of knowing.

We used Burgundy, Champagne, and Tokay yeast strains in those days. Each one of these Davis recommended. We combined the three together, because the Champagne gave you heavy sediment, the Tokay withstood high fermenting temperatures, and the Burgundy gave you the flavor. So we were told, anyway. Regardless, we did make good wine.

Hicke: How long did you continue with that?

Parducci: Until the dry yeast became available to us, probably in the seventies.

Hicke: What do you use basically now?

Parducci: We use all kinds of yeasts now. In white wines we use Champagne, Montrachet yeast, etc. I can't recall all of the varieties, there are so many of them. We use three or four of them at the present time. Each one has a specific purpose and quality. We are still trying different varieties of yeast. If we're going to ferment white wines very slowly and very cold, we use a certain kind of yeast that can withstand the cold temperatures. In red wines we usually use Pasteur. They all have different characteristics, and everyone's experimenting. We are experimenting with one now from Holland. I've never heard of it before, but it's like Tom said yesterday, "There are a lot of yeasts, and it's interesting to try different ones experimentally and see the results."

I think we should go back to fermenting red wines with a natural yeast from our area. We're going to do some research on that. We're going to ferment wines next year with natural yeast, and then with the dry yeast or some of the yeast cultures we know of. We're going to do both in red wines. We're not going to try it in white wines, I don't think.

Winemaking Styles##

Hicke: I want to ask something about the importance of the different styles of winemaking.

Parducci: I think, there again, we're getting back to where the consumer is so intimidated today because of the different styles. I don't know what we're accomplishing by the different styles. I guess we have to learn to use different kinds of wood to learn whether or not we want our wines to go through malolactic and if the quality is enhanced by leaving them on the lees. We're trying to get down to some basic product that people will recognize and buy, and I don't know where we're going with all this messing around with different processes. I guess that's progress. I think the winemakers are going way beyond the mentality of the average consumer.

I'd like to ask consumers: What do you think about all these different styles? Somebody's going to have to do something just to get us back down the middle of the road

or we're going to be lost pretty soon. I ask myself why consumption just keeps going down and down. There's got to be a reason for it. Are consumers frustrated? Are wines too expensive? Why can't wines be simple and enjoyed rather than an ego trip or a mystic?

Hicke: Is this an attempt on the part of different wineries to differentiate themselves from other wineries?

Parducci: They're all looking for a hype; they're all looking for that cloud, that rainbow up there, or something that will get the consumer's attention. I read in the paper last night where Fetzer was named the winery of the year at the Los Angeles fair. Now, I don't know why they were--probably won more awards or something. But anyway, that's what everybody's looking for; they're always looking for some little hype that will make people flock to the store to buy their wines, rather than concentrating on a wine that everybody's going to drink, enjoy, and afford. We don't need the wine snob who'll buy it and stick it in his cellar and talk about it and then drink nothing. I wasn't raised that way. When I walk into a restaurant, I would like to see wine on every table, as you do in Europe. How many wines did you see last night? You saw three bottles.

Hicke: Yes, all furnished by you.

Parducci: And look at what we paid for those wines last night.

Hicke: And I think Californians are certainly more knowledgeable about wines than much of the rest of the country.

Parducci: Out of state usually is a disaster. It's discouraging. People don't know wine. I don't know if they don't like it, or if we're not educating people enough to drink wine with food and enjoy it.

Hicke: I think they don't know it. Having grown up in the Midwest (of course, that was some time ago), I can say that Mogen David was about all we came in contact with.

Parducci: Oh! [laughter] We had a young man working for us who never drank a bottle of wine in his life. We started giving him a tenth bottle for his lunch. Well, you know, in two or three years he couldn't sit down and have a meal without a glass of wine. And we didn't give him a big

Cabernet; we gave him what we were drinking--ordinary red wine.

Hicke: It just adds so much pleasure to your meals.

Parducci: Sure.

Hicke: As I said before, I think you're doing your bit to change all this. Let me ask you about another thing: you're making two different lines now, I think--the Cellarmaster and--

Parducci: I've got an ego like every other winemaker. The Cellarmasters are wines that come out of this winery that will compete with any boutique in California. That's what we're trying to do. Like I mentioned before, the restaurants won't put our wines on the wine list because they're too cheap. Last night we paid twelve or thirteen dollars for those wines. You know what the winery receives for the wines we had last night? We get two to three dollars a bottle. So most restaurants mark them up three to four times. That's normal. Okay, if they pay three dollars for a bottle of wine, four times three dollars is twelve dollars. If they put a Mondavi or something like that on there that costs them six dollars, that's eighteen to twenty-four dollars; look at the profit they're making.

Plus the fact is that our wines are found in supermarkets, so all the consumers know what our wines sell for. When they go into a restaurant and see it for eighteen or twenty dollars, they're very upset about it. So if you put a boutique wine in a restaurant, nobody knows what it sells for in the store because you don't find them everywhere. They are usually harder to drink, too; they usually are tannic and oakey. Last night we had a competitor's Zinfandel. Remember how tannic it was? It was very tannic. Well, we didn't particularly like it, either.

Hicke: We liked the Parducci Zinfandel, though.

Parducci: Well, yes, but if you put that wine on a market shelf,you will find that most consumers will pick out the competitor's wine almost every time because it's more expensive.

Hicke: So your Cellarmaster is a boutique--

Parducci: They're all aged in French oak, very expensive wood, and they're the best grapes we can buy. They are wines to put in your cellar, not to put on a wine list; they're aging wines. They're big and have lots of fruit in them. They're wines to put away. They are my selection and must be above average wines. We don't have Cellarmasters every vintage.

Hicke: Are they Zinfandels, Cabernets?

Parducci: We've got Pinot Noir, Petite Sirah, Cabernet, Fumé Blanc, and Chardonnay.

Petite Sirah

Hicke: Speaking of Petite Sirah reminds me of one thing I never did ask you. It was never used to make a varietal wine before you started doing it, so how did you handle it in order to make a varietal out of it?

Parducci: The ones I have in my cellar--you know, most of my cellar is full of Petite Sirahs--

Hicke: Old ones?

Parducci: Yes, going back to the sixties. Those were made the old-fashioned way: left on their skins until dry, and they were big and tannic, and that's why they last so long. One of our biggest-selling red wines is a Petite Sirah. Our technology and philosophy have changed in making Petite Sirahs. Instead of leaving it on the skins for a long, long time--as you know, Petite Sirah can be a very intense tannic wine if made in the old winemaking practice. In the present process I crush the grapes in an ice-cold tank, and I leave it there for three or four days before I inoculate it with yeast culture.

What I'm doing is breaking the skins down and extracting most of the color and the fruit that I can without any alcohol present. Alcohol extracts the hard tannins from the skins and the cap ends, so you have a big, tannic wine. Well, I take it off about two days after it's inoculated, so I don't have the hard tannins. I have a

rich, soft wine that I can bottle a lot younger, and it's very delightful to drink. This is the way I'm doing most of my red wines, except for Cellarmaster wines; the Cellarmasters are left on the skins until dryness and beyond.

Hicke: Why do you think nobody had been making Petite Sirah?

Parducci: Well, Concannon [Vineyard] did in the early sixties, and we did it in the early sixties for the tasting room here. In the early days first generation Europeans were drinking a lot of wine, and they were not accustomed to drinking those big wines. As you know, they drank the second wines that were very low in alcohol and very fruity. The American public was drinking port, sherry, muscatel, Tokay, and those kinds of wines. There were no red wine drinkers; very few. So bottling a Petite Sirah--who would drink it? It was a blending grape and too heavy for everyday consumption.

Hicke: So it was a lack of demand, rather than anything else?

Parducci: Yes. It was a blending wine. We always used to put it in the Carignane and the Zinfandels. We produced only one red wine to speak of; that was all we ever bottled. We didn't have any varietals. It was, as I mentioned before, seven different labels on the same wine.

Frank Schoonmaker

Hicke: Were you familiar with Frank Schoonmaker's ideas?

Parducci: Sure. I sold Frank a lot of wine. Yes, I knew him very well.

Hicke: Did he influence some of your decisions to make more varietals?

Parducci: Well, he influenced me in that when he came here he found wines that he absolutely loved, and it meant a lot to me. I can remember the last tank of wine I sold to him. It was a tank of Zinfandel; it was on the right-hand side, the third 20,000-gallon tank, and he bought that. He died, and

a lot of history died with him. He used to come up here with another individual (I can't remember his name now).

We sold a lot of wine to Paul Masson. Mr. [Kurt] Opper was the buyer, and he just loved our wines. And they were all made the old-fashioned way. They were big, fruity, beautiful bottles of wine. We made some outstanding red wines then.

Hicke: You sound like you regret those days.

Parducci: Yes, I do. Like I said, I think we're getting too sterile, and we're getting too finicky with our wines. We're just not making them the old way anymore. I made my best wines in that old wood.

Hicke: Redwood?

Parducci: Yes. The tanks were shallow and the fermentations were slow; they were natural--there was no cooling or anything. We made excellent wines.

VI NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

Sale of Parducci to Teachers Management & Investment Corporation

Hicke: Since we're about up to the seventies, maybe we can get back to the story of your winery. I'd like to hear about the sale of it to Teachers--how you found them and why you sold it.

Parducci: I think the way the winery was constructed--can I reminisce a little and tell you a story that I think will be very interesting to you? Before we started the winery, right where the winery now sits was an oak grove. The creek that drained all of the watershed from the upper ranch came through the grove, and every year the Indians used to congregate there and have their pow-wow. Each year I would look forward to their arrival. They would all stand in a circle and dance around the fire and pass bones hand to hand--Indian games, I would guess. When we started to build that winery we removed the grove of trees. The original winery was of all wood construction, built in the center of the canyon. It was all done by hand. In the forties we widened the winery, constructed the concrete walls that you now see, and made the winery a lot bigger. Then in '48 we constructed the upstairs.

All that winery was built by hand. Lots of the materials were used materials, until in later years when we started remodeling the whole facility. The construction of that first winery was hard work, and

I am very sorry that we don't have any pictures of it; although we do have pictures of the old winery before we remodeled it. We did have pictures of the old home before it was remodeled. However, we are unable to find any of these at the present time. I guess remodeling and moving these many years, somehow the photos were lost.

After George and I purchased the winery from our father and brothers, all of our money was invested. We needed a partner to help finance our growth. There was a man who was on the TMI board who had a daughter going to school at the University of Washington. His name was Fenter Angel. He stopped by here--TMI was always buying a lot of properties--and wanted to know if our winery was for sale. We said, "No, it's not for sale." Well, he stopped here two or three different times and he got the same answer. Finally one day his boss, Mr. [Robert] Fitzpatrick, called us and wanted an appointment with us, so we gave him the opportunity to meet with us.

On our board at the time was my father; Charles Shimmin, the vice president of the Savings Bank of Mendocino County, whom we had done business with; George's schoolmate, John Golden, an attorney who is now superior court judge of Lake County; and my brother George, my father, and myself. There were five of us. We met with Mr. Fitzpatrick, and he gave us this pitch about schoolteachers having no intention of running a winery; they were only interested in social security and tax shelter. John Golden suggested that he look into this company and see how legitimate they were, and he said it might be a good thing for us, being that we were strapped for money and wanted to expand the property. That would be one way of doing it and still retain an ownership in it.

So he investigated and found that they were an outstanding company, and that it would be a financial asset for Parducci because we would have approximately 1,800 salespeople, and they'd all be stockholders and would ask for and use our wines. They had no intentions of running a winery and knew nothing about a winery, and we would run it like we wanted--like a family. We decided to go with them,

Wines and Vines
October 1976

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The winery, a handsome white stucco and stone structure with brick trim is one mile north of Ukiah just off U.S. 101. John Parducci has a stainless steel tank farm installed by Santa Rosa Stainless Steel. There are 19 tanks of 9,930 gallons each, all jacketed. At least 1,200 tons a day can be crushed. At dedication time Monostori was cold-stabilizing jug Burgundy; it stays in the refrigerated tanks two weeks. A redwood tank installation is the work of Frank Stefanich, whom Parducci acclaimed for his craftsmanship. An additional bank of redwood was to be added in late 1976 for a total of 23 redwood tanks of 4,300 gallons each. "There are no leakers," beamed John Parducci. "Frank Stefanich has been installing tanks here since 1931; he knows his business. Notice that there are no bungholes. There are valves in the tank bottoms with a patented gooseneck."

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Another speaker was Ernest Banker, boyhood friend of John Parducci and Chairman of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors.

Philip Hiaring

and we've never been sorry. We operated this facility as a family and as our own. The schoolteachers used to come up here to the tasting room, and they were thrilled that they owned part of the winery. It was a great, great marriage, and has been ever since. We have never had anyone tell us how to run this winery; we do what we want to. I think all of our investors are pleased with our operation. They have two offerings of wine a year, like I just showed you.

Hicke: Twice a year you do a wine offering for them?

Parducci: Yes, and they come up here and visit the winery all the time. They just love it.

Hicke: It's a pension fund for teachers?

Parducci: No.

Hicke: It's just an investment?

Parducci: Yes. Teachers Management & Investment owns stock. I don't know how many individuals there are--there are probably eight or ten people who own the stock of this company--and they manage the money for the schoolteachers. For instance, if they want to buy, say, the Discovery Inn, and Discovery Inn wants $2,000,000, TMI offers a prospectus, and they offer 2,000 shares. Each share is $1,000. Every schoolteacher in California, or anybody affiliated with the school system, is eligible to buy one, two, ten, or any amount of shares they want of that particular property. Then if another piece of property comes up, they have the same privilege. Each piece of property is separately owned. Most of their investments were in raw land. We were the first commercial venture. I believe they now own condominiums, storage places, golf courses, and all kinds of properties.

Hicke: How did Mr. Fitzpatrick find you?

Parducci: Mr. Angel was familiar with the winery, so he just stopped in to see if we were for sale. That's how it started.

Hicke: He had in his mind to look at wineries, then?

Parducci: Yes, he was looking at anything they could purchase that had value.

Hicke: Did he look at others?

Parducci: Not that I know of. Of course, they'd heard about our wines, too, because we were selling a lot of wines in Los Angeles, and they knew we were pretty aggressive. It's been a wonderful relationship with TMI.

The Third and Fourth Generation Parduccis

Hicke: Right after that you did some pretty serious expansion, so that helped--

Parducci: Yes, and George and I put in all that stainless steel and a lot of new equipment, more tanks. And just three years ago, my son went on another $4,000,000 expansion, which is in the back; that's all his project. He was an electronic engineer and worked in aerospace for about fourteen years. He's a real good engineer.

Hicke: When did he come into the business?

Parducci: I'd say ten years ago. He worked in Downey. He graduated from Northrup School of Engineering and then went to work for McDonnell-Douglas [Corporation]. Then they moved him to Sacramento, and from Sacramento he went to Rocketdyne for a short while. Then he went back to Los Angeles, and then I brought him home.

Hicke: So he didn't really grow up with the idea of going into the winery?

Parducci: No. My other son's been with me all the time--my oldest son, Dick. Billy is the youngest one, and he has two sons that are going to school now--Billy [Jr.] and Richie. Dick has one son who's running a

computer now and is working in our city, and then he has a daughter.

Hicke: When did Dick come into the winery?

Parducci: He's always been here.

Hicke: Did he go to school to study enology?

Parducci: No. He was handicapped. We almost lost him when he was a baby. He was nine months old and doctors couldn't find his problem. He was just skin and bones, almost dead. No one could find out what was the matter with him. Finally someone said, "Why don't you take him down to this German doctor in Santa Rosa, Dr. Kontes?" So we did, and I'll never forget that day.

I don't know if Margarett was holding him or if I was holding him, but he was in a little blanket, a shriveled up little guy. Mrs. Kontes weighed about 300 pounds, and she was sitting on the lawn with about ten little children around her. She got up, and we went through this little white gate. We introduced ourselves to her, and she says, "What have you got there?" Margarett says, "Our little son. No one can seem to find out what's the matter with him. He can't keep any food down."

She pulled the blanket aside and took one look at him, and she said, "I know what's the matter with that baby." She said, "You're breast feeding him, aren't you?" Margarett says, "Yes." "Well, he's allergic to your milk. You've got to put him on goat's milk." And that was during the Depression; goat's milk was thirty-five cents a can, and Margarett and I didn't have--we were going to school and were as poor as church mice. Our druggist here in town was a very close friend of the family, so he got us the goat's milk at his cost.

Dickie snapped right out of it, but in the meantime he had a shrunken stomach. He was in a full cast for about fourteen years; he had a curvature of the spine. And he's had nothing but problems all his life; his teeth are bad. But he's the greatest guy in the world. Look at him now, he's six feet-two and

a half, straight as an arrow, and everybody loves him. He's a very handsome young boy. But physically he's--well, he's had a heart attack at forty-four.

Hicke: So he's been helping you for a long while.

Parducci: Yes. My other son is like a piano wire. He's very brilliant, a hard worker, extremely meticulous, and very aggressive. He runs this business when I'm not here.

Hicke: And one of your grandsons is studying to be an enologist?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: He already graduated in viticulture, right?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: And the other grandson, Bill's oldest?

Parducci: He's super-brain. He's a computer analyst, an MBA [Master of Business Administration]. He also has a degree in biochemistry. He's the one they wanted to have stay at the university. He'd never make a professor; he's just not that kind. [laughs] Too aggressive.

Hicke: Well, you've got your fourth generation carrying on.

Parducci: Yes, the fourth. The fifth are age two to six, so we don't know what they're going to do.

Hicke: They haven't developed a palate yet. [laughter]

Parducci: No.

Expansion

Hicke: Somewhere I have that around that time, the 1970s, you bought the Merola Ranch. Is that right?

Wines + Vines October 1976

John Parducci, left, with tasting room architect Bud Plone of Newport Beach.

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John Parducci was named "Winemaker of the Year" for 1980.

The honor was accorded the Mendocino County, California, winegrower by the Los Angeles chapter of the Knights of the Vine and was the first of its kind. Parducci, general manager of the family winery, is a Supreme Knight of the Vine. In 1980 Parducci Wine Cellars won 10 awards at the Los Angeles County fair, nine at the Mendocino County Fair and nine more at the Orange County Fair. Included were five gold medals. The national marketer is Vintage Wine Merchants of San Francisco.

Parducci: Oh, yes. We sold that. That's over in Lake County. We were going to plant grapes there, and we decided it was too far to transport them. So we sold the ranch. That was a beautiful piece of property, right at the intersection of Lower Lake and Highway 20. It's still a beautiful piece of property, but they're not doing anything with it. Somebody who had a lot of money bought it and has been sitting on it all these years, running some cattle on it.

Hicke: I just read in Wines & Vines that you're 39th in the nation in volume.

Parducci: Yes, we're nothing in the wine world--very small.

Hicke: Nothing? [laughs]

Parducci: No, we're just little.

Hicke: Two million gallons storage capacity?

Parducci: Yes. We're little, though. Four hundred thousand cases is nothing. Am I correct that Mondavi is up to 2.5 million, and Fetzer is up to 2 million? We're peanuts. I prefer not to get that big, either. I have no interest at all. Just let those other people build those monsters. You've seen many changes in this industry. You've seen what has happened to some of the large wineries. You know, what's going to get you is what you don't see--labor, catastrophes, markets, etc.

I could never understand--maybe you can tell me--what possesses people to want to be so big. I'm only interested in making a good living, making better and better wines, and having some sense of security of mind and body. At least I can back off and operate down to the bare bones. Many wineries can't. When you've got something big going on, there's not much room to back away; you've got to keep going or overhead will gobble you up. You've got to have income coming in because your expenses go on, such as interest, insurance, upkeep, etc. I've got all I can handle here.

Hicke: It sounds like you're much more interested in experiments and innovations than in increasing the absolute volume.

Parducci: Yes. I'm interested, as I mentioned before, in making a living for myself, my family, and my employees. Also in building a chain of command after I am gone that has some members of my family at the helm. I don't want to leave a monster behind.

Viticulture

Hicke: Let's get into a little bit more about the grapes here. I've read that you're particularly interested in matching the grapes to the location.

Parducci: That's going to take a long, long time. As new varieties come around, we will have to do more research. What I'm trying to say is that Chardonnay is grown all over California now, and all over the world, as a matter of fact. We're all making wine out of Chardonnay grapes, and what are we learning? We're learning that different microclimates produce different wines. It all boils right down to what style you like, or the public likes. Chardonnay is produced almost everywhere. The grapes from Monterey County, etc., make the big, lush Chardonnays. Are those the ones that are going to be selling and preferred by consumers? Or is it going to be the one that's a Chablis style? I guess the drinking public will decide the style and price.

Now, when we get back to red grapes, it's a different story. I think I mentioned to you before that I'm telling all my growers in Mendocino County to plant reds, because we have the soil here that produces outstanding reds. I think the North Coast counties can only produce the best red wines. What kind of red wines? Well, red grapes that make good red wines. Are they Cabernet? I don't think it's going to be Cabernets; people aren't drinking Cabernets as much as they used to. Maybe it's the Zinfandels; maybe it's a blend of the Petite Sirahs

and the Zinfandels; maybe it's a blend of other varieties that many of us are experimenting with.

But first we've got to find the locations where they produce the best grapes. I may plant a Sangiovese here, and it may not bear or ripen. A good example, the Napa Gamay will not ripen in Mendocino County. We have some clones of Nebbiolos that are producing at the present time in Mendocino County that we are not happy with.

Hicke: And there's no way to find out except to plant them here and wait for the results?

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Parducci: I think the only way we can find out is to plant them and find out what kind of wines they make and what kind of vines we have. Then we're getting into that scenario about the rootstocks; there many rootstocks available also. I've always believed in rootstocks in Mendocino to be the deep-rooted ones, because the soils here are worn out and we have clay soils; you have to have a rootstock that penetrates the clay and seeks its own moisture. You can't produce quality with a lot of irrigation.

Another thing that's worrying me, too, is that when our winery was smaller we had equipment so that I could handle small lots of grapes. Well, now we have equipment that takes forty tons to process, so we're not doing it the smaller way. However, I'm going to start doing something on a smaller scale; I'm going to start getting smaller equipment--some smaller presses and some smaller tanks--just to handle smaller choice lots. It is difficult to handle small lots with big equipment; it would drive you crazy. That's where the small wineries have an advantage over us as far as making small lots of super premium wines.

Competitions

Hicke: Is there a lot of competition for these awards?

Parducci: Oh, yes. There are probably four or five hundred wineries that participate, if not more. I'm highly recommending to my company to not participate in every competition--only the more prestigious ones!

Hicke: You mean to Brown-Forman?

Parducci: Yes. I'm trying to get them not to participate in all of these judgings, because they are not that important anymore. There are just too many of them. You put the same wine in fifteen competitions, and surely in one of them you're going to win an award. Doesn't mean too much, really.

Hicke: But doesn't that enable the seller to--

Parducci: Yes, if they take advantage of it, but many don't take advantage of it! Look at all the awards I won this year; I won the international award with our Fumé Blanc--once in a lifetime award. But I failed to find this award mentioned in any of the markets I visited.

Hicke: Well, the Liquor Barn put out a coupon for a 10 percent discount on gold medal award winners, and your Petite Sirah was in there. But I guess that's one of the few times I ever had seen that, and maybe they're one of the few companies that do that.

Parducci: Our company does print a lot of material for the vendors. However, a lot of it doesn't reach the marketplace in a display. I think it's too bad, because the consumer is looking for something to zero in on and needs help to make his or her selection of wine.

Hicke: Exactly--some way to differentiate the wines. Even if it doesn't make any difference, the consumer might be more attracted.

Parducci: It helps if they put anything out there, but there is not much out there--very little that I can see.

Harvesting

Hicke: Mechanical harvesting--have you got equipment for that?

Parducci: Yes. I was never in favor of mechanical harvesting, but I guess when you get down to the nitty-gritty, there are advantages to it. Because as you get into the volume that we're getting right now--all grape farmers start picking early in the morning, say at seven o'clock. We have fifty-nine growers, and by the time a grower has a load picked for delivery to the winery, it is ten or eleven o'clock, and it creates a big problem because you have so many trucks at one time that you have to take care of. Plus the fact that we're not utilizing our equipment during the day. Therefore we have to crush later in the afternoon and at night to catch up.

Also, labor is not plentiful anymore. Since the Mexicans have been allowed to stay in California they all are going into the jobs that are paying a lot more money--the timber industry, restaurants and hotels. They're not going to come out here and pick grapes when they can get jobs at five, six, seven, eight dollars an hour. So the labor force has gotten to be very critical and scarce.

The other problem is that when you have as much acreage as we have, it takes so long to harvest it with hand labor that when we get adverse weather conditions we have more problems. Two or three years ago we almost lost all of our Chardonnay crop; if it hadn't been for the harvester, we would have lost it all.

There are many advantages to a machine, especially the ones they have today. They're getting down to where they're picking clean fruit. They pick everything, of course. You're able to pick at nighttime; the grapes are very cool. They come into the winery at eight o'clock in the morning; so you can start pressing immediately at eight o'clock, and you eliminate all that congestion from all the growers, and you make a better product because the grapes do come in cool. It's less expensive for

refrigeration, and you're able to go in and harvest a big acreage in just a few days. But if everyone machine harvested, then we'd create the same problems; instead of everybody getting here at eleven o'clock, they're all going to be here at eight o'clock.

The other thing about it is that, being an old-fashioned winemaker, I prefer to look at the cluster of fruit when it comes into the crusher, and when you machine harvest grapes you don't see many clusters; it's mostly berries and a lot of juice, and I don't like that. So there are advantages and disadvantages, but I think that if you have to weigh one against the other, the machine harvesting is the best. But I still insist on buying my grapes hand picked. On our own ranches we will machine harvest as much as we can and hand pick the rest of it. A lot of it we can't machine harvest because it's on the hills and too steep for mechanical harvesting.

Hicke: But all the grapes that you buy from other growers are hand picked so you know what you're getting?

Parducci: Oh, yes. So far--but there are now three new machines in the area this year. One grower who has always hand picked has got a machine now, and another grower in Hopland has a machine. So two of my growers will be bringing their grapes in machine harvested now. Each grower will only be allowed to deliver so much per day, allowing the winery to handle all growers' grapes and to allow the winery to process them to produce the best wine.

Industry Trends: More White Wines

Hicke: Just to talk about the industry as a whole for a bit, you've mentioned several times when whites started being drunk more than reds, and you responded to this by making white wines. Is that more or less right?

Parducci: It was very costly for our winery and for every winery in California when we had to dispose of a lot of our wood tanks and use stainless, and with a lot

of expensive refrigeration, a lot of modern filtration equipment. It was very, very costly for the winery. We went from a 95-percent-red winery to a 65-percent-white in just a few years. With the new technology and equipment, we won many awards for our white wines because of our winemaking and good housekeeping, better handling of the grapes, and bringing in good varieties from good growers. We were able to make some good wines. But it was very, very expensive, and it still is a very expensive project for our winery.

If it weren't for the white wine, it would be no problem at all making red wines now--except our winery is getting to the point now where we couldn't make a lot of red wines. Our facility is pretty much--I'd say 60 or 70 percent--white wine equipment. Our new 20,000-gallon tanks up in our new facility are suitable only for white wines; you couldn't use them for reds very well. You could use them for storage; that's about all you could use them for. They're not good for fermenting reds. So you're really handicapped and stuck with the whites. And I don't think we're going to be drinking predominantly whites forever. I think a few years from now we'll be a red-wine-drinking nation, if we use Europe as an example.

Hicke: Because as people learn more about wine they gain more appreciation for the reds?

Parducci: And reds go with more foods. Last night we had Zinfandel with salmon; there's nothing wrong with that, and we enjoyed it, didn't we?

Hicke: It was wonderful.

Parducci: It's all up here [points to his head], you know. I just think we're going to be drinking more red wine. I certainly hope so.

Marketing and Product Decisions

Hicke: How do you decide how many different kinds of wines to make?

Parducci: When we planted fourteen varieties at Talmage, we didn't know what varieties would do the best in Mendocino County, and that's why we planted all those varieties and made all those wines. But I'm hoping we can reduce the numbers back down to eight or ten varieties at the most, if that many. I just can't see making all these varieties.

Hicke: So part of it was experimentation?

Parducci: That's all; that's all it is. And don't forget, now that we had these varieties, what do you do with them? We had the Carignanes, Charbonos, Petite Sirahs, Zinfandels, and we had the French Colombards; we had all those before all the true varietals came in. Now we are going to see another change; we are going to see Nebbiolos come in and many other Italian varieties planted, and we're going to see a whole bunch of other varieties being planted.

And the marketing companies today want to sell what's easy; they don't want to promote a new brand. That's one of our problems. Gallo can afford to promote a brand, and he does, by advertising.

Hicke: Does Brown-Forman handle marketing for you?

Parducci: Yes.

Hicke: What's their philosophy?

Parducci: Make money. [laughter] That's all.

Hicke: How do they go about it?

Parducci: They're liquor people, and they have a couple of brands that made money for them--Jack Daniels for one, and Early Times, Bushnell Scotch, Lennox, Hartmann luggage. I guess these are very profitable for them. The wine business to them is a very new thing. They have a couple of Italian labels, and we're the only California label. They have Bola, Candida, Cella, and one more, I think. They're

Market Watch
June 1990

Winemaker Makes Presentation In Honor Of Reagan

Veteran California winemaker **John Parducci** recently bestowed a check to the American Cancer Society (ACS) in honor of ACS's presentation of its "Humanitarian Award"

Winemaker John Parducci (right) greets former President Ronald Reagan.

to former President **Ronald Reagan**. Parducci, co-founder and president of Parducci Wine Cellars in Ukiah, California, made the donation on behalf of the employees of his company.

The Parducci presentation was made at a special reception and luncheon held at the Four Seasons Biltmore Hotel in Santa Barbara which raised more than $41,000 for ACS. Parducci additionally donated bottles of its 1988 sauvignon blanc, which was served at the reception.

Parducci Wine Cellars was founded in 1932 by John Parducci and his father **Adolph**. Four generations of the family have been involved in the winery. Parducci wines are marketed and distributed by the Brown-Forman Beverage Company.

learning the wine business, and they're willing to promote the brand.

Hicke: How do they promote it?

Parducci: Oh, by doing all kinds of things, like back-up cards, shelf talkers, putting me on the road, putting a lot of wine tastings all over the United States, sending wine to all the wine writers every month, getting a lot of press and TV and radio interviews--getting our name out there in front of the public.

Konocti Winery

Hicke: Let's switch to the Konocti Winery and how you got it. First I think you got interested in planting grapes in Lake County.

Parducci: I made wine from Lake County grapes, oh, in the late thirties. There were several old vineyards there that I made wine from, and I was very impressed with the county and the quality of the grapes. When my boys were in 4-H, they had a friend who raised Angus cattle. He was also in 4-H, and his father had excess acreage and wanted to plant grapes. We encouraged him to do that.

Hicke: You mean as a 4-H project?

Parducci: No, it wasn't a 4-H project. This young man was the same age as my boys, so he had to be nineteen or twenty, but his father had some acreage in Kelseyville and wanted to plant grapes. He was old enough to take over then. So he planted Zinfandels and Cabernets, which started a lot of growers doing the same thing. A few years later a group of growers hired a consultant to build a winery for them. It was a co-op and didn't prove to be very successful. Finally they came to me and wanted to know if we could help in any way, so I talked my brother into buying half interest in it.

So we did; we bought half interest in the winery and immediately put in a lot of stainless steel

tanks; we put in over 100,000 gallons of stainless steel tanks. We bought new presses, built a warehouse, and did a lot of things with the winery. We improved our marketing and restructured our personnel, and then three or four years later I lost my brother. In the meantime, needing more capital to expand, we took on two more partners. We just diluted our share and the growers' share to a quarter instead of a half, and that's where it stands today.

We fired the manager that we had there and got a young man who's very aggressive and very good. And we hired a new winemaker. We have an aggressive young winemaker in there now, and we're doing great. We're winning a lot of awards. The Lake County people are wonderful, wonderful people to work with because they're all pioneers; they're all old, old families. Very easy to work with, and very nice people, and it's a joy to be a partner at Konocti. We're doing great. We're making some outstanding wines, and we're going to do better.

There's a lot of new acreage going in. I went into partnership with a friend of mine, and we have a 400-acre ranch over there now. It's a beautiful ranch, all in varietals. It was all planted in domestic root. As you know, Lake County is losing all its vineyards with the phylloxera. A lot of the growers are replanting on other rootstocks, so I think that in another five years there won't be an original vineyard left, it's going so fast. But we're making good wines. Kendall-Jackson [vineyards] is just across the street, doing great, as you know.

Hicke: How much participation do you have in Konocti?

Parducci: I try to go over there once a week, and we have a board meeting every month with the growers [Lake County Vintners] and the owners. We have a budget, and we're running it very well. One of the members of the board and one of the owners is an attorney, Peter Windram, who is an outstanding young man from an old, old-time family. So we have a great family of people; it's a great little winery. We have purchased some more land; we bought the land behind us and the land in front of us, which borders the

highway, so we have highway frontage. The winery sits almost on the highway, you know. Then we have all the acreage in the back, and we're putting in a grape test plot there now. We're going to make that an experimental station with all different kinds of rootstocks and different varieties of grapes.

Hicke: Is that a UC Davis testing?

Parducci: We're doing it with their help.

Hicke: Were they doing some early testing up there, too?

Parducci: No, not that I know of.

Hicke: What are you testing there?

Parducci: We're putting in all kinds of varieties--lots of Italian varieties, all kinds of varieties.

Hicke: Not just California varieties?

Parducci: No, we're putting all kinds of varieties in. It's going to be an interesting plot.

Hicke: How much do you plant of each variety?

Parducci: Probably two rows--twenty-four or forty-eight vines, something like that.

Hicke: I've got a bottle that was given to me of a 1980 high-alcohol Zinfandel. I haven't opened it yet, but I wanted to ask you about the high alcohol.

Parducci: Well, I don't like it. You know, where do you use it?

Hicke: I guess that's why I haven't opened it, because I figured we would just drink a little bit.

Parducci: We made that eight or ten years ago by our previous winemaker. I didn't really agree with a lot of his winemaking skills.

Hicke: The relationship that you have with the growers is an interesting one. Does that kind of relationship happen very often?

Parducci: Oh, yes, they're just like part of our family.

Hicke: It works really well?

Parducci: Oh, yes. Working in Lake County is a lot different than working around here.

Hicke: Why is that?

Parducci: Because the people are natives; they're old-time families. They're not the Johnny-come-latelys who come in here and buy a ranch, and he owns a clothing store or is a movie star or a big-time wheeler and dealer. It's a whole different breed.

Our partners in Lake County are farmers; they understand the soil, they understand what the problems are at the winery, they understand what it is to make a dollar, they understand what it is to make a gallon of wine. They're all part of it; it's part of their life.

There are some good farmers around here, too; they're the old-time farmers who understand that both sides have to make a profit. But over there, most are natives of Lake County. I don't think there's one that I know of who hasn't lived there for a hundred years, or his parents have lived there for a hundred years.

Impact of Corporate Ownership of Wineries

Hicke: Another thing I might ask you to comment on is big multinational corporations that buy wineries, and what impact that has on the industry.

Parducci: It has a lot of impact, because, as you know, they're tough competition out in the marketplace. A good example: look at the present grape prices paid--the highest in my history. How can we make wines affordable for everyday drinking at these prices? Big bucks mean big money to spend for grapes. We can't survive at current prices. Furthermore,

consumption should increase each year and not decrease.

Hicke: But because large corporate ownerships are backed by so much capital they can?

Parducci: Yes, and there are large growers all over California. They have or buy grapes from the Valley that are so much cheaper and make blends that we are unable to compete with. Our label says Mendocino County. It is difficult to compete in the marketplace with wine produced from these different appellations because of the price differential of grapes. As an example, you can buy Chenin Blanc in the Valley for approximately $200 per ton. In Mendocino it is about $550 or $600 a ton for Chenin Blanc. That is one of the problems.

Mrs. Housewife doesn't look at the mandatory on the label and doesn't know the difference between a Mendocino or California appellation, or that Mendocino grapes are much more expensive. So you might ask me why I don't use the California appellation; well, because my company doesn't want me to do that. My company wants me to stay with the Mendocino appellation. Therefore I can't compete in the marketplace.

Appellations

Hicke: You just reminded me of another question: the appellation system is one that you've long been promoting.

Parducci: Yes, the Mendocino, Lake, and North Coast appellations.

Hicke: First of all, tell me how it got started up.

Parducci: I think it started when we started marketing our wines. The three North Coast counties started using the Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino appellations. Later we were able to include Lake County. Remember Italian Swiss Colony's "Li'l ol' winemaker, me"? They

commercialized Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino. It seems to me that worldwide, the California appellation has more meaning to the consumer than Mendocino, etc., probably with the exception of Napa County.

Hicke: So you're not in favor of the appellation system?

Parducci: Oh, I am up to a point. I'm in favor of county appellations--Mendocino County, Lake County, etc.; I'm in favor of that.

Hicke: But not micro-appellations?

Parducci: No, micro-appellations I'm not in favor of, because I don't think it means too much in the marketplace overall. Availability of wines is limited and often becomes confusing to the consumer. However, that's only my opinion.

André Tchelistcheff

Hicke: I think André Tchelistcheff was a consultant for Konocti Winery at some point?

Parducci: Yes, before George and I went into it. We kept him on because he was a friend. He was very knowledgeable about the industry; we could sit down and have lunch and a nice glass of wine and be sociable and learn a lot from him. And I still enjoy that; I still think he's a great friend.

Hicke: Can you tell me a little bit about him?

Parducci: I don't know too much about his--I know he worked for BV [Beaulieu Vineyard].

Hicke: What about your relationship with him? What are your impressions of him?

Parducci: I think he's a very knowledgeable wine person. I think he's a little--he's just like I am; we're not modern enough, I guess; we're not keeping up with the times enough. But he is, because he's consultant for so many wineries yet. So he is keeping in touch with

modern trends and modern appellations. He's a very outstanding person--not only outstanding, but an unbelievable person. At his age, the way he drives around and goes all over the country, it's remarkable. I think he's eighty-eight years old. It's absolutely amazing. And he's sharp! He's still sharp. He has a good palate, and he has a wonderful wife. I like the guy very much.

Winemaking: Present and Future

Hicke: Can you think of any areas of your career that we haven't discussed?

Parducci: I guess my traveling is about all. I've had a lot of wonderful experiences in my travels, and I've met a lot of wonderful people. I think I'm probably as well known out of state as any winemaker in California. I want to continue doing as much as I can. I have no intention of retiring. I'm not trying to make wines for awards, and I'm not looking for another plaque; I just do what I have to do, and I enjoy doing it. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to do what you want to do because of--

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Parducci: --the trends. You don't know what the consumer's going to be drinking next, and you don't know what grapes you want the grower to plant. It's not a stable industry anymore, like it used to be. When I grew up in this business we had four varieties, and we made one wine and everybody drank it. Today we're spending fortunes on planting a new variety, and then three or four years later not using that variety anymore. It's frustrating and not fun anymore.

At most wine-tasting functions I find that consumers, instead of drinking and enjoying the wine, are always trying to find out what's wrong with the wine. We're looking for something that's not there. Wine is to be enjoyed, with food or without. It makes good conversation and enhances every meal.

I try to get all of my employees involved in our winemaking. I enjoy getting people involved in creating new products. But I find it difficult to extract opinions from most of my employees, and also to extract new ideas. I feel I'm much more aggressive, maybe because I grew up in this business.

Hicke: From what you told me yesterday, it sounds as if you taste almost the chemistry of the wine--not so much whether you like it or don't like it, but you can actually taste the different components.

Parducci: I don't taste wines that way. They must have balance, fruit, and complexities that make the wine taste good. As I said, I grew up in the wine business, and I still want to put out the best bottle of wine I can with what I have to work with. You can only go so far, you know, but with what you do have, let's try to make the best that we can. Because it's very important; it's our livelihood. Wines need satisfied consumers and good press. Otherwise you take three steps backwards. And we never get any bad press, thank heavens.

Hicke: I was going to say, you don't have to worry about that.

Parducci: But I don't want any bad press, either! I want to go up a couple of steps once in a while; I like to compete with some of those individuals who are so much on the hot line all the time. I like to see my name up there in the [Wine] Spectator with ratings, in the nineties and above once in a while. That's what's important--not because I want to win another award or anything; it's just that I've got to have some press that will help sell another bottle of wine.

Hicke: And it's also personal satisfaction to you, I think.

Parducci: Exactly. Look at the awards we've won this year; my competition gave me those awards.

Hicke: How many awards have you won this year?

Parducci: Barbara tells me over 120.

San Francisco Chronicle
Wednesday, January 27, 1988

Wine Industry Honors Young 70-Year-Old

BY ROD SMITH

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The California wine industry paid tribute to one of its elder statesmen Friday, when 300 of John Parducci's closest friends gathered at the Mark Hopkins Hotel to celebrate the Mendocino County winemaker's 70th birthday.

The black-tie event also honored an exceptionally long and distinguished winemaking career, spanning 54 consecutive vintages with the 1987 harvest. Parducci has been named winemaker of the year by industry publications and organizations more often than any other vintner.

"And this man's not about to retire," he told the crowd Friday night. "I'm still a very young winemaker," he said. "This industry's young, and there are lots of challenges out there."

Parducci's father, Adolph, purchased the original Parducci vineyard in Mendocino County in 1921. The winery was founded in 1932.

According to popular legend, John Parducci's career began at the tender age of 14, when he was sent into the jungles of Hoboken, N.J., to peddle the family's grapes to home winemakers. That, and the limited production of altar wines, helped the family business squeak through the Depression and Prohibition.

Today, John Parducci is the acknowledged patriarch of the Mendocino County wine industry. Three generations of Parduccis operate the winery, producing a dozen varietal wines annually from several large, family-owned vineyards. The Parduccis and their financial partner, Teachers Management and Investment Corp., also own the Konocti Winery in neighboring Lake County.

John Parducci is particularly known for his excellent Zinfandels and Petite Sirahs (both of which he was among the first to bottle as separate varietals in the 1940s), and also for fine Chardonnays. A distinguishing feature of Parducci's winemaking style is his steadfast reluctance to use oak barrels for aging his wines. "Oak spoils the flavor of wine," he claims.

At a vertical tasting of Parducci Petite Sirahs held at the Clift Hotel on Thursday, tasters discovered remarkable freshness, balance and depth of flavor in wines going as far back as the 1972 vintage.

Parducci Chardonnays, *sans* oak with few exceptions, are consistently used by professional tasters as a standard against which the character of oak-processed Chardonnays may be truly judged.

Medal Winners

Parducci Wine Cellars is proud to announce that on November 19, Winemaster John Parducci became one of the "handful of living American wine pioneers" to be honored with the WORLD OF WINES Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Winemaking.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is presented only to recipients who have made significant contributions - 50 years or more - to the wine industry.

More than 200 of the nation's most noted winemakers, wine experts and enthusiasts attended the presentation, which was made at a gala dinner that concluded the three-day WORLD OF WINES Festival held at the Ritz-Carlton in Laguna Niguel, California.

Parducci Wine Cellars

BRONZE	'88 Gamay Beaujolais	1989	California State Fair
NEW RELEASE	'88 Pinot Noir		
NEW RELEASE	'88 Vintage Red		
GOLD	'87 Zinfandel	1989	Reno Wine Adventure
NEW RELEASE	'87 Cabernet Sauvignon		
SILVER	'80 Charbono	1988	California State Fair
BRONZE	'86 Petite Sirah	1989	Mendocino County Fair
SILVER	'80 Cellarmaster Petite Sirah	1988	Dallas Morning News
BRONZE	'88 Chardonnay	1989	National Orange Show
SILVER	'88 French Colombard	1989	L.A. County Fair
SILVER	'88 Sauvignon Blanc	1989	Calif. State Fair
SILVER	'88 Vintage White	1989	Calif. State Fair
BRONZE	'88 Chenin Blanc	1989	L.A. County Fair
NEW RELEASE	'89 Mendocino Riesling		
NEW RELEASE	'89 White Zinfandel		
BRONZE	'88 Gewurztraminer	1989	Atlanta Internat. Wine Festival
NEW RELEASE	'89 Muscat Canelli		
SILVER	'84 Late Harvest Zinfandel	1986	L.A. County Fair

Konocti Winery and Vineyards

BRONZE	1988 Alegre Red	L.A. County Fair
SILVER/ BEST BUY	1986 Cabernet Sauvignon	American Wine Competition
BRONZE	1986 Merlot	Orange County Fair
SILVER/ BEST BUY	1987 Chardonnay	American Wine Competition
GOLD	1988 Fumé Blanc	Atlanta Wine Festival
NEW RELEASE	1989 Alegre - White	
NEW RELEASE	1989 Alegre - Blush	
SILVER	1986 L.H.White Riesling	West Coast Wine Competition

WARNING: Drinking distilled spirits, beer, coolers, wine and other alcoholic beverages during pregnancy can cause birth defects.

Order Form

ORDERS MUST BE POSTMARKED BY SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 1990
(All wines are 12/750 unless otherwise stated)

PARDUCCI PREMIUM WINES	*PRICE PER CASE	# OF CASES	TOTAL AMOUNT
RED WINES (Light to Full Bodied)			
'88 Gamay Beaujolais	$31.00	_____	_____
'88 Pinot Noir	33.00	_____	_____
'87 Zinfandel	41.00	_____	_____
'88 Vintage Red	30.00	_____	_____
'88 Vintage Red (6/1.5)	29.00	_____	_____
'87 Cabernet Sauvignon	56.00	_____	_____
'80 Charbono	42.00	_____	_____
'86 Petite Sirah	35.00	_____	_____
'80 Cellarmaster Petite Sirah	46.00	_____	_____
WHITE WINES (Dry to Semi-Sweet)			
'88 Chardonnay	$56.00	_____	_____
'88 French Colombard	32.00	_____	_____
'88 Sauvignon Blanc	45.00	_____	_____
'88 Vintage White	30.00	_____	_____
'88 Vintage White (6/1.5)	29.00	_____	_____
'88 Chenin Blanc	35.00	_____	_____
'89 Mendocino Riesling	34.00	_____	_____
'89 White Zinfandel	31.00	_____	_____
'88 Gewurztraminer	44.00	_____	_____
'89 Muscat Canelli	40.00	_____	_____
SPECIALTY/ DESSERT WINES (Sweet)			
'84 Late Harvest Zinfandel	$62.00	_____	_____
Marjon Brut Champagne	62.00	_____	_____
KNOCTI PREMIUM WINES			
RED WINES (Light to Full Bodied)			
'88 Alegre - Red	$32.00	_____	_____
'86 Cabernet Sauvignon	54.00	_____	_____
'86 Merlot	56.00	_____	_____
WHITE WINES (Dry to Semi-Sweet)			
'87 Chardonnay	$54.00	_____	_____
'88 Fumé Blanc	45.00	_____	_____
'89 Alegre - White	32.00	_____	_____
'89 Alegre - Blush	32.00	_____	_____
'88 White Riesling	45.00	_____	_____
'86 Late Harvest White Riesling (12/375)	60.00	_____	_____

Total Cases	_____	_____
Total Dollar Amount	_____	$ _____
Add Handling Charges	_____	$ 20.00
Total Amount Enclosed	_____	$ _____

California Sales Tax Included

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Hicke: That's very impressive.

Parducci: Like I said, everything we put in competitions is off the shelf; we don't have special lots.

A few things have to happen in our industry. One thing is that most wine writers must need to write more about the excellent low-priced wines and recommend drinking wine with every meal. The exorbitant prices that restaurants charge for wine is ridiculous. Restaurants are hurting the wine industry. When they charge such high prices for wine, there's going to be no one drinking wine. Whereas if they had wine that was reasonable, everybody would have a bottle of wine. But when a bottle of wine costs you more than the entree, no one will buy it or enjoy it.

Hicke: I know, and if you buy a good wine by the glass it's $4.50 in places in San Francisco.

Parducci: Who wants to pay that? We must convince restaurants that not everyone can afford an expensive glass or bottle of wine,and that there are many inexpensive wines that are excellent and can be sold at a reasonable price. We should persuade wine writers to write about the many values and quality that exist in the lower-priced wines.

I was on a panel recently with a wine writer from Chicago. He wouldn't judge White Zinfandels; he didn't like White Zinfandel. [laughs] I said, "Come on, you judge a wine for what it is." Then we got into it, and he said, "Well, they don't have any flavor or anything." I said, "You know what? That's the trouble with some of you; you don't understand winemaking. Did you ever pick a grape at sixteen [Brix] and expect it to have a lot of fruit and flavor? That grape's not even half matured, and of course it doesn't have any flavor, but it has other things. Okay? That's what you judge it for." Well, as a panel we accomplished our job.

For many years I have participated on judging panels in and out of California, some major competitions. It's difficult for me to assess at

this point how much competitions help to increase wine consumption.

Many wines do not receive wine awards; however, they do have quality and are good values. Also, awards in general are not consistent in all competitions. This leads me to believe that some improvement can be made in the selection of judges. I think all competition judges should in some way be qualified to judge. As it stands now, anyone can receive an award if he enters enough competitions. I guess competitions do tend to make winemakers produce better wines. Also, I see the need for awards to help the consumer make his selection of wine while looking at hundreds of labels on the shelf.

I firmly believe that all winemakers work very hard to produce good wines. However, Mother Nature doesn't give us a vintage year every year, and we have to do the best we can. I think we are too serious with our wines. They should not be critiqued to death. Let the consumer decide what is good or bad and what to drink with his or her meal.

To summarize, my opinion as an older winemaker in our industry is that I see much improvement needed in promoting wine. Wine is meant to be used with food; it is a staple of life. Wine should be simple, easy to drink, inexpensive, and drunk in moderation. A healthful beverage that God gave us for better life, health, and happiness.

Hicke: I think that answers all my questions. I want to tell you how much I've enjoyed hearing your recollections and the history of the winery. Thank you very much for your participation in this project.

Parducci: Carole, it's been a pleasure talking to you.

Transcriber and final typist: Judy Smith

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M.A., San Francisco State University; U.S. history with emphasis on the American West; thesis: "James Rolph, Mayor of San Francisco."

Interviewer/editor/writer, 1978-present, for business and law firm histories, specializing in oral history techniques. Independently employed.

Interviewer-editor, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1985 to present, specializing in California legal, political, and business histories.

Author: Heller, Ehrman, White & McAuliffe: A Century of Service to Clients and Community, 1991.

Editor (1980-1985) newsletters of two professional historical associations: Western Association of Women Historians and Coordinating Committee for Women in the Historical Profession.

Visiting lecturer, San Francisco State University in U.S. history, history of California, history of Hawaii, legal oral history.